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ABSTRACT

The press has long been considered the "watchdog" of government, yet today, more than 100 newspaper editors also serve in public office. A study sought to determine the types of role conflict that arise for editors who hold public office, the public's reaction to such dual roles, and the policies of several leading newspapers concerning editors or publishers holding office. Inquiries were sent to press associations to identify publishers who served as public officials, and five publisher/public officials were selected for interview. Additionally, the newspapers they published were examined, and 75 of their readers were polled for their reactions to the newspapers and their publishers. Results showed varied responses from major newspapers, ranging from those who discouraged such activity for fear of conflict of interest, to one who encouraged its editors/publishers to remain active in such community affairs. Results of reader questionnaires suggest that most disagree in principle with editors holding public office, but many do not object to their own newspaper editors doing so. Results from the five interviews suggest that some editor/public officials become printers of "good news" newspapers, using them for community morale boosting. Others are more like the fiery libertarians of the nineteenth century, using their newspapers to attack political opponents. A third style is the editor/official whose newspaper is bland and not thought-provoking. (JC)

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THE PUBLISHER AS OFFICIAL: CONFLICT OF INTEREST OR LIBERTARIAN VESTIGE?

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INTRODUCTION

> In a free society,...the function of the press is...to oppose the government, to scrutinize its activities and to keep its authority within appropriate bounds.[1]

That notion of scrutiny--the adversarial function of the press--manifested itself early in North America. Benjamin Harris[2] and James Franklin[3] printed not "by authority" of government but in spite of it, and thus helped establish the tradition of editorial independence, without which no press can be called free.[4]

This tradition has been maintained through the 1970s and into the 1980s. In the last opinion that U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black wrote--his concurrence in the "Pentagon Papers" case--he said:

> In the First Amendment the Founding Fathers gave the free press the protection it must have to fulfill its essential role in our democracy. The press was to serve the governed, not the governors. The government's power to censor the press was abolished so that the press would remain forever free to censure the government. The press was protected so that it could bare the secrets of government and inform the people.[5]

Black thus described an ideal of an autonomous press serving as a watchdog of government. But in the real world,

the press-government demarcation has been less clear. Public officials have often involved themselves with the press, whether that involvement was as informal as the "media-political elite integration" that occurs with constant interaction with the press,[6] or as formal as serving as an editor or publisher.

Today, more than one hundred newspaper editors are also serving in public office or, at some point during their lives, have served as editors and public officials simultaneously.[7] This study explores whether such editors are performing in what would be called a "socially responsible" manner.

To be sure, the U.S. Constitution guarantees freedom of the press to all citizens. But as suggested above, one of the cornerstones of libertarian thought has been that the news media should be independent of government (including, presumably, local government or governors). Under this libertarian philosophy, the news media are to serve as surrogates for the public and to act as watchdogs, checking on and criticizing the actions of public officials when necessary.[8] In short, libertarian models of national government envision an independent press, "a fourth institution outside the Government as an additional check on the three official branches."[9]

Certainly, though, the assumptions suggesting this press-government distance have been modified by events in the real world and at the non-national level. History has shown that politically-motivated men have sometimes become newspaper editors and publishers. In particular during the nineteenth century, many editors were ideologues who bought newspapers to advance their political views. Shaw and Brauer[10] have studied

the case of an outspoken North Carolina editor during the Civil War who, for example, opposed the war effort, organized an opposition political party, and ran for governor.

William Randolph Hearst was elected to Congress, twice lost mayoralty election bids in New York City, and in 1906 ran unsuccessfully for governor of New York against jurist Charles Evans Hughes. According to one analyst, Hearst's "eye was on the Democratic presidential nomination of 1904, but politicians cleverer than he blocked his bid."[11]

William Allen White, editor of the Emporia, Kansas, Gazette, also considered entering political races and eventually chose to run in a gubernatorial race in order to pursue his opposition to the Ku Klux Klan.[12]

Five newspaper or magazine editors have run for president of the United States, including the 29th president, Warren G. Harding, former editor of the Marion, Ohio, Mirror. Robert LaFollette, editor of LaFollette's Magazine, won the Progressive Party presidential nomination in 1924 and tallied nearly five million votes in losing to Calvin Coolidge. The New York Tribune's Horace Greeley was nominee for president in 1872. Liberty Party presidential candidate (1840 and 1844) James Birney published an anti-slavery newspaper. Finally, Henry A. Wallace, editor of Wallace's Farmer and New Republic magazines, became Franklin D. Roosevelt's vice president and would later challenge Harry S. Truman.[13]

Despite any otherwise laudatory accomplishments of these individuals, their "dual roles" could be seen as representing a potential conflict.

But of course strict libertarianism has in some respects been eclipsed by "social responsibility." Still, while the essence of the Hutchins Commission's call for a socially responsible press was that press freedom from government intervention must be "earned" by the press's behaving responsibly, press-government distance remains an essential tenet of this model.[14]

To be sure, the idea that America's press is or can be socially responsible has its critics.[15]

Others, however, accepting the principle of a socially responsible press but lamenting the dearth of truly adversarial character in today's press, might ask how socially responsible a non-watchdog press can in fact be. How responsible can the press be if the objective reporting, surrogate, and watchdog functions of the press are filled by a newspaper editor who simultaneously occupies the role of his supposed "philosophical adversary," a public official?

We might assume the worst and and recall Brucker, who suggests: "We should be shocked if a government sought to pollute the air we breathe, or to poison the food we eat. Yet managing the news, even with good intentions, poisons the information the public gets."[16] Hulteng and Nelson present similar arguments for the journalistic "non-attachment"[17] Milton presaged with his 1644 caution that, for truth to survive, "government should keep out of the battle and not weight the odds in favor of one side or the other."[18]

Plainly, though, government and public officials are not always going to remain separate and apart from the newspaper

business. William Peter Hamilton, a former Wall Street Journal editor, points out that newspaper owners and editors are not bound to adhere to any abstract social responsibility "theory." He says:

> A newspaper is a private enterprise owing nothing whatever to the public, which grants it no franchise. It is therefore affected with no public interest. It is emphatically the property of the owner, who is selling a manufactured product at his own risk.[19]

Indeed, for some newspaper entrepreneurs, the cloak of press privilege or constitutional protection is invoked, perhaps even learned, only when the paper's business is threatened.

Thus while the idea of a public official's controlling a dominant communication channel to constituents seems, on the face of it, to conflict with the spirit of libertarian press tradition and perhaps social responsibility theory as well, there are no enforceable mandates, no constitutional prohibitions to prevent such dual roles, or to ensure that those wearing "two hats" do behave responsibly.

Will such folks behave reponsibly, of their own volition?

In Cullman, Alabama, the editor of the weekly Cullman Tribune is also a city councilman and the high school principal. A political opponent of his, Rick Henry, who ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 1980, argued:

> How can you put a fox in to guard the hen house? Raymond Clarke, as an editor,

> isn't interested in printing the news in such a way that it would have a stimulating effect on the community. Who appointed him as a watchdog for the news media? I'm glad the other news media are watching him. He's sincere all right. He's sincere in making himself and the city council look good. I don't doubt his sincerity. Hitler was sincere.[20]

SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

This study set out to explore this dual role phenomenon, using a variety of approaches: an examination of pertinent professional guideline and ethical code prohibitions or restrictions; an examination of news organizations' policies; interviewing of publisher-officials and readers; and an examination of the content of the newspapers of the publisher-official.

Specifically, the study seeks to answer certain research questions about public officeholders who also control newspapers. Can an individual who occupies the dual roles of newspaper publisher and public official serve to check government? Are there conflicts in a member of government's serving as a journalistic surrogate and attempting to report news in an objective manner? Is it possible for a newspaper owned by a public official to be perceived as socially responsible and not just as responsive to the official?

While the previous discussion of libertarianism and social responsibility provide an institutional-level framework for the

study, and the "community conflict and the press" work of Olien, Donahue and Tichenor[21] an even less abstract institutional or organizational context, role theory is utilized as a conceptual framework for the study's focus at the individual or occupational level.[22]

Role theory is the scientific study of behaviors characteristic of persons within contexts which seeks to explain behavior through an analysis of roles, role expectations, reference groups, and role conflict.[23] Several role theory terms are used in this study to describe ways in which the roles individuals occupy influence their behaviors and the perceptions and behaviors of those around them.

Social Role. A patterned sequence of learned actions performed by a person who occupies positions within a social system or organization.[24]

Role Position. An identity that designates a commonly recognized set of persons who occupy a place in a social relationship.[25]

Role Expectations. Expectations held by others for the appropriate behavior that should be exhibited by the person holding a given role.[26]

Role Intensity. Seven levels of role intensity have been identified operationally, ranging from the lowest level--a kind of mechanical implementation of a role function--to the highest level of involvement which includes the integration of self and role.[27]

Reference Group. Any group with which an individual identifies himself such that he tends to use the group as a

standard for self-evaluation and as a source of personal values and goals.[28]

Role Conflict. Behavior which occurs when the expectations between roles inhabited by a single actor are inconsistent, contradictory, or mutually exclusive so that conformity to one expectation necessarily entails nonconformity to another expectation.[29]

Apparently, the potential role conflict for the publisher-official has escaped systematic research attention. Even the professional literature has been silent, with an exception being a 26-year-old opinion piece by U.S. Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.), who was then serving his third term in the Illinois General Assembly. Simon owned a group of newspapers, and, not surprisingly, "strongly supported" the idea that public officials should own newspapers.[30]

Researchers in other disciplines, on the other hand, have shown how role conflict can develop in situations where individuals occupy two roles simultaneously. Typical of these pertinent studies is Mitchell's examination of elected officials operating simultaneously in the business world. He concluded that, "the fact that most politicians serve in more than one role as elective public officials guarantees [emphasis added] conflicts among norms of performance."[31]

Of course everyone occupies multiple roles and experiences some degree of conflict when one role makes demands on another role in terms of time, values, or loyalties (e.g., career woman/mother/wife/homemaker). But while some individuals seem to handle multiple roles and their demands easily, for others

the conflict is more salient--there is greater role intensity and conflict.

This study sought to determine the salience of role conflict for publisher-officials, or if indeed such a conflict was even perceived. And, depending on the extent to which others also perceived the conflict, we expected members of the publisher-official's varied reference groups to evaluate his performance differently.

The study owes its genesis to research which indicated that in some communities there is an absence of any adversarial relationship between government officials and the local press, and as a result, a presumed absence of role conflict (between "booster" and "watchdog" roles) that subsequently makes possible the "we're all in this together," consensus-style reporting often found in smaller communities.[32]

In their study of 88 Minnesota newspaper editors, Donohue, Olien and Tichenor found that the editors saw themselves as promoters of civic endeavors. Few felt they should serve as watchdogs over government, and only two reported that their newspapers regularly reported local controversy. Most wanted to put their best foot forward--and the best foot of their communities.[33] Janowitz had earlier reported that the community press is often viewed by the public as any other business or institution in the community and that such a view means that the public sees the newspaper's role as one of maintaining the status quo through developing community spirit, encouraging growth, and supporting the existing social-political structure.[34]

PROFESSIONAL GUIDELINES AND CODES

Social responsibility theory and news media codes of ethics have a striking similarity: both represent "a kind of public 'diary of conscience,' a written record of the character of a profession."[35] However, examination of 19 early codes of ethics and journalists' creeds reveals that none of them directly addresses a situation in which a publisher holds public office.[36] Still, some codes of ethics seem to suggest that public officials should not be serving as publishers.

For example, the code of ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, states that "journalists must be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know the truth."[37] The Canons of Journalism of the American Society of Newspaper Editors argue, in discussing editorial independence, that "freedom from all obligations except that of fidelity to the public interest is vital."[38]

These codes and principles, however, are typically drafted and adopted as abstract ideals. Because we presumed that the operating papers or procedures of newspaper organizations or groups might address specifically possible conflicts of interest, we queried--by mail--executive officers of these news organizations or groups. These decision-makers were asked what policy--written or implicit--would be invoked--if at all--if an employee also served as a public official.

While no claim of exhaustiveness, let alone representativeness, is made for the responses highlighted below, we feel these comments reflect a wide range of formal and informal policies.

Howard Simons, former managing editor of The Washington Post, wrote that an unwritten policy prohibits Post reporters and editors from serving as public officials.

> As our Style book makes clear, we avoid active involvement in causes of any kind--politics, community affairs, social action, demonstrations--that could compromise, or seem to compromise, our ability to report and edit with fairness. Although it has become increasingly difficult for this newspaper and for the press generally to do so since Watergate, reporters should make every effort to remain in the audience, to stay off the stage, to report history, not to make history.[39]

The Times Mirror newspaper group--which includes the Los Angeles Times, has a policy prohibiting its editors or publishers from seeking or serving in public office. And while some might argue the prudence of such a policy for "national" newspapers of record such as the Post and Times, Otis Chandler, chairman of the board of the Times Mirror group and editor-in-chief of the Times, wrote: "I would be philosophically opposed to any newspaper editor or publisher serving in elective office, regardless of the size of the newspaper or the community."[40]

The policy of another major group, Scripps-Howard Newspapers, does not speak specifically to the dual role of

publisher and elected official, but prohibits "paid work of any sort for any branch of government, any political organization, any candidate, or any politician."[41] While the likely intent of Scripps-Howard policy, it seems, was to head off news employees' working for politicians, the emphasis on "paid work" is curious.

Other newspaper groups, however, have no such formal, written policy. Instead, policy which prohibits serving in public office is implied; dual roles would simply be out of the question.

John J. Curley, senior vice president of the Gannett group and president of the Gannett Newspaper Division, stated unequivocally that, "None of our editors or publishers serve in elective office. We do not feel that it should be the case."[42]

And J. Allen Meath, executive vice president of Park Newspapers, Inc., said his organization would "find it very difficult to accept the premise that an editor or a publisher can serve in elective office." His rationale was what one might expect: "We would find it very difficult to take an inefficient school board to task when our editor or publisher is a member of that board."[43]

Carmage Walls, president of his family's Walls Investment Co., said, "There is no publisher in the Walls family who is serving in an elective office. I personally would not encourage this and I doubt if the other members of the family would encourage it."[44]

But these organizations have not weighed the need for a written policy and then cavalierly dismissed that possibility.

As K.R. Thomson, chairman and president of Thomson Newspapers in Canada and the U.S., wrote:

> The company does not have a formal policy because it has not been a problem and because we also believe strongly in delegating to our editors and publishers a great deal of local autonomy. My personal view is that I am opposed to publishers and editors seeking political office. I think the pursuit of political office by an editor or publisher could lead to conflicts of interest. This could jeopardize the objectiveness of editors or publishers which is so necessary to the pursuit of their responsibilities.[45]

Note however that Curley and Meath speak primarily in terms of whether editors or publishers should hold office, and Thomson and Walls voice only personal opposition. Lacking formal policy, are there special circumstances that might outweigh these beliefs?

Two newspaper executives said that certain circumstances may indeed allow their editors to serve in public office. One, James E. Burgess, executive vice president of Lee Enterprises, wrote:

> Each newspaper develops its own policy in Lee for the outside activities of editors, news people and other employees.

> Generally, there is one standard for newsroom employees that is very prohibitive and one for non-newsroom people that is less restrictive. We encourage publishers to be very much in their communities. There are some elective offices such as State Board of Education that attracted one of our publishers. We do encourage publishers and all other newspaper executives to participate fully in community boards and services.[46]

Even the lofty New York Times admits to exceptional circumstances that might permit dual roles. The Times' Leonard R. Harris, director of Corporate Relations and Public Relations for the New York Times Co., said that the Times has very few printed policies, because employees are expected to discuss questions of conflicts of interest with editors.

> Certainly, questions would arise about some elective or appointed positions. But the editor would simply examine the situation to see whether a conflict of interest might arise. If a reporter lives in Westchester and covers the courts in Brooklyn, it is hard to see why he or she should not run for office in Westchester to serve on a school board or a town board. But if the reporter both lived in Westchester and covered events

> in Westchester, then elective or appointed office could indeed result in conflicts of interest.[47]

Philosophical conflict aside, Harris added that, "Certain positions require so much time that a reporter or editor could not function effectively in both."[48]

Of course, as Harris noted, many Times employees have resigned to take positions with the city, state, and federal government. Further, the New York Times Co. encourages its employees to play active roles as citizens. But, he added:

> We stress that the name of the paper and the company should not be used by anyone so involved, since such use could imply an endorsement of a party or a candidate by the newspaper or the company.[49]

The Times policy of tolerating dual roles is not absolute, however, and special problems arise with the smaller member papers of the group.

> Insofar as other newspapers in the group are concerned--twenty daily newspapers and ten weeklies--the individual publishers make these decisions for themselves; we do not set forth a group policy, although we certainly encourage dialogue with the group president. Clearly, in a community of 5,000, any public position is a great deal more 'public' than is a similar position

(e.g., a position on a school board) in a city of seven million. It is up to the individual publisher and editor or reporter to use their own judgment and knowledge of the community to decide what is appropriate. In case of doubt, the decision would certainly be to preserve the objectivity of the newspaper above all.[50]

Other industry leaders echoed Thomson's, Burgess's and Harris's view that decisions on role conflicts should be local ones. Typical are the responses of officials in press associations who have dealt with association members occupying both editor and public officials' roles, and who saw a need to keep those roles separate. William Schabacker, manager of public affairs for the American Newspaper Publishers Association, wrote:

> ANPA adheres to the principle that policies on ethics, or any other policies for that matter, belong to, and are the prerogative of the individual newspaper and that such policies should not be administered by others outside the newspaper, unless these policies are defined by regulation or law. However, we're confident that publishers and editors do strive to follow the ethical principles of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, which in part says that "jour-

> nalists must avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety as well as any conflict of interest and appearance of conflict--that they should neither accept anything or pursue any activity that might compromise or seem to compromise their integrity." That makes sense.[51]

More fiercely absolute was the voice of Michael J. Kramer, manager of the Minnesota Newspaper Association, who said that organization's policy had been to "preach against" editors and publishers holding office. But, despite "the ranting and raving" of Kramer and his predecessor, editors and publishers continue to hold public office. Kramer cited a mayor who, in addition to publishing several papers, presided over the Minnesota Newspaper Association, and described editors and publishers who sat on city councils, and school, county and township boards. Echoing Harris, Kramer said, "This is a larger problem in a smaller town where there are fewer leaders in the community."[52]

But while the principle of whether dual roles constitute conflict of interest is easily argued, does the conflict have any consequences?

The Wall Street Journal profiled Bill Hobby, who was then president and executive editor of the Houston Post and had been Texas lieutenant governor since 1973.

Hobby protested that "I'm on leave of absence (from the company) when the legislature is in session and I don't direct day-to-day news coverage." But Hobby acknowledged meeting with

Post editorial writers to "give out ideas," and occasionally suggesting stories to Post reporters. The Journal concluded that publisher politics "is most pronounced in small towns where it is traditional for the owner of the local newspaper to be a community mover and shaker."[53]

Other "consequences" of dual roles have also occurred. A Knoxville News-Sentinel reporter in 1983 ran for and won a school board seat in a town outside Knoxville, and was dismissed.[54] A Duluth Herald & News Tribune section editor was fired for refusing to withdraw candidacy for a city council seat.[55] Notably, neither the Newspaper Guild nor the paper's "conflict of interest" policy for editors expressly forbade running for or holding political office. Publisher John McMillion told the New York Times that, "Credibility is the sole issue. Newspapers are so critical of others that we have to live clean lives and not be people who live in glass houses but throw stones."[56]

Newspaper editors who have actually been elected or appointed to public office express a variety of reactions on managing role conflict. Consider the publisher of the Lewiston, Idaho, Morning Tribune, who dutifully listed all business, political, and civil affiliations of every member of his news operation, and recognized the potential conflict in his serving as president of the Idaho Board of Education his paper covered.[57]

Mike Augusburger, editor of the Bloomfield, Iowa, Democrat, and mayor of Bloomfield, said he minimized potential conflict through reassignment of duties: "I have disassociated

myself from any reporting about the city council. My publisher now covers those meetings, and I continue to cover other public bodies as always."[58]

But former Eldon, Missouri, city councilman and Eldon Advertiser editor Wallace G. Vernon wrote: "If I had to do it over again, I would probably resist the urge to run for office because it certainly is easier to maintain objectivity from the outside looking in." Vernon said editorial decisions became "extremely difficult" when he, as editor, sat in executive session of the council.[59]

In sum, guidelines, codes and policies reflect a general ambivalence. Many large newspaper group executives argue that decisions on role conflict should be local, which of course is where conflicts would be most visible. And many who fear potential role conflict recognize exceptional circumstances. Finally, while some suggest that the critical concern is whether the roles clearly overlap (i.e., a journalist covers his/her "own" board or office), journalists have lost jobs when no such clear overlap existed.

One concern that surfaced repeatedly supports this study's focus on small towns. The Wall St. Journal concludes that publisher politics "is most pronounced in small towns where it is traditional for the owner of the local newspaper to be a community mover and shaker."[60] And the Minnesota Newspaper Association's Kramer said, "This is a larger problem in a smaller town where there are fewer leaders in the community."[61]

THE PRESENT STUDY

Method

The present research was composed of a series of case studies, with each study employing several research techniques: a standardized instrument generating quantitative data; analysis of newspapers as documentary evidence; and in-depth personal interviews.

In addition to providing a richness of detail and sensitivity to the local environment of publisher-officials, the case study design was chosen because of the difficulty encountered initially in trying to identify a population of publishers who are also public officials. While conventional media directories list publishers, they do not list public offices held. Directories of state and local officials give office held but rarely indicate other sources of employment.

The Purposive Sample

The eighty subjects in the study included five community newspaper publishers and fifteen subjects from each of five social role categories (as discussed below, interviewees in the five categories were identified by social or occupational roles and by determining whether they regularly read the newspaper).

In an attempt to identify a working population of publisher-officials, inquiries were sent to managers of state, regional, and national press associations. Even though a list of more than one hundred names of publishers who are or have been public officials was generated, responses (some accompanied by managers' admissions of uncertainty as to the comprehensiveness of their data) were received from only 35 states.

In selecting the purposive sample of five publishers from the list of 100 generated earlier, only current elected officials were considered. Publishers were contacted by letter and by telephone and given a brief outline of the proposed research (they were told they and some readers would be personally interviewed and asked to respond to a standardized instrument, and that the investigator would review issues of their newspapers). The publishers in the sample, their office or offices, names of newspaper, and cities are:

MARVIN PROFFER, state representative, Cash-Book Journal, Jackson, Missouri.

MAHLON WHITE, city councilman, school board member, Benton County Enterprise, Warsaw, Missouri.

DANIEL MILES, SR., mayor, Clinton Eye, Clinton, Missouri.

RODNEY BRENNER, sheriff, community college board of trustees, Herald-Enterprise, Golconda, Illinois.

RAYMOND CLARKE, city councilman, high school principal, Cullman Tribune, Cullman, Alabama.

These men were chosen because of the diversity of local and state offices represented (national officeholders, e.g. Congressmen in Washington, would be unlikely to regularly edit the newspaper; admittedly, those national officials-newspapermen would likely experience less role conflict than the local officials chosen), and because of comparable ownership of weekly newspapers. The deliberate selection of these five cases limits the generalizability of the study; what is perhaps gained is a greater diversity of cases than might have been obtained in a more scientific sample.

The purposive sample of readers was selected on the basis of their occupancy of one of five occupational or social roles which result in their having some interaction with the newspaper as readers, or with the publisher as members of the publisher's reference groups.

The five role categories were themselves selected, in part, on the basis of the fact that they were different in role expectations, in social position, and in affiliation to reference groups. Differences in these five role categories might predict differences in perception of the publisher's performance and any role conflict he might experience. Three persons were selected in each of the five categories of readers from each community, with a total of fifteen providing a rough cross-section of readers who have various levels of interaction with the publisher. No claim of representativeness of these 15 is offered.

The role categories are:

Professional. Such persons were members of a high status group of influential local citizens who, along with the publisher, hold membership in the same organizations, clubs, or church.

Blue-collar worker. In most small towns, blue-collar workers make up the largest percentage of the population. The blue-collar worker was likely not a member of the publisher's social reference groups, so his perspective on publisher performance will differ from that of the professionals.

Advertiser. The advertiser has a stake in the success and image of the newspaper. He or she was also a member of the

business community. Thus, advertiser and publisher were members of a common group--the business community.

News media representative. This person was a radio or television newsperson whose area of coverage includes the sample community, or a newspaper person whose paper circulates in the same area. A news representative might have some understanding of press-government tensions, perhaps of social responsibility notions, and such individuals should apprehend the media's watchdog and surrogate functions; this subject, then, would have a unique perspective for evaluating how effectively the publisher performs those functions. Also, these subjects would recognize conflict between the publisher and public official roles.

Political opponent. These individuals were persons who had been candidates for the publisher's public office or members of an opposing political party. Such individuals could provide "information" or a countering point of view on the adequacy of coverage of controversial issues, or on the balance of coverage of political races.

The Instrument

Because of the nature of the study, both structured (a standardized instrument was administered) and in-depth interviews were conducted in each of five communities with the publisher and fifteen of his readers. In-depth interviews afforded respondents an opportunity to provide their own situational definition, encouraged the interviewee to structure his own account of the situation, and allowed the interviewee to introduce his notions of relevance rather than relying on the

investigator's.[62]

Interviews with the publishers and readers and a preliminary section of the research instrument were designed to collect biographical, personal, and clarifying information. The instrument itself is designed to provide a quantitative index or measure of publisher-official performance which would be comparable across and within case studies. Fifteen Likert-type items were developed, with responses recorded on a five-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." For comparison purposes, the items were scored--and summed to form a composite index--in such a way that lower scores indicate greater perceived "responsibility." That is, the more subjects agreed with items citing specific "sins" of irresponsibility, the higher the "irresponsibility" index value. Correlational analyses were planned in order to assess the unidimensionality of the index.

In terms of press "theories" discussed earlier, statements represent efforts to operationalize measurement of the degree to which publisher-officials are perceived (or perceive themselves) as exercising their "watchdog" and journalistic surrogate roles and to what extent they promote a forum for ideas. Other statements measure perceptions of role conflict when the publisher is offered a hypothetical situation featuring cross-pressures between loyalty or norms of a "peer" group and allegiance, duty or, if you will, responsibility, to readers.

The statements were developed in a two-phase process involving judgments by journalism educators, and pretesting on two groups of undergraduate students.

The Operational Plan

Before the personal interview was conducted with each publisher a review of the previous year's newspaper front and editorial pages was completed. Stories that dealt with the public office and stories judged to be of a controversial nature were analyzed to provide insight into coverage of and by the publisher-official. Where appropriate, excerpts from news stories and columns written by the publisher-official are included in the present study.

Each interview with a publisher opened with a series of questions designed to gather biographical information, to gauge political ambitions, and to ascertain the publisher's own image of his role. Publishers completed the standardized instrument, and follow-up questions were asked based on news articles and columns the publisher had written, and on responses to the instrument. Publishers were asked to recommend readers in the community who would fit the five role categories (e.g., "Name one of your advertisers...." "Who did you face in the last election...?"). Finally, a second, return interview was conducted, including questions prompted by interviews with readers.

RESULTS

The 15 Likert-type items were conceived as collectively indexing[63] reader views of publisher-official performance. Item analysis suggested that one statement, however, should be removed. The item, asking if the community newspaper is "critical of the actions of local public officials and local government," was--surprisingly--uncorrelated (Pearson R = 0.05) with the summed index.[64]

// Table One about here //

See Table One for the item-total correlations of the summated rating scale, which we here label a "Social Responsibility Index" (SRI). SRI scores provide the basis for between-role and between-town comparisons detailed in Table Two. Because the component index items deal with a variety of "sins" of irresponsibility, the higher the index score, the less responsible the local paper and, presumably, its publisher-official.

For each role group in each town, the members' (n=3) scores on the SRI were averaged, yielding the "cell" means displayed in Table Two. Because several statistical assumptions precluded use of parametric techniques, these cell means were used in a non-parametric Friedman's two-way analysis of variance by ranks, as described in Gibbons, Kerlinger and Siegel.[65]

The Friedman analysis was performed on ranks (shown in Table Two) computed for SRI means both within towns and across role types, as well as within role types and across towns. The statistical null hypothesis--that the distribution of ranks

TABLE ONE

Items of the "Social Responsibility Index" (SRI) and Item-index Correlations[a]

Statement:	Correlation to Total:[b]
My community newspaper serves as the public's watchdog over local government.	.60
It is a good idea for public officials at all levels—local, state, and national—to own and edit their own newspapers.	-.71
The editor of my community newspaper would not publish a story unfavorable to an advertiser if the advertiser asked that the story not be published.	.37
When there are opposing positions on issues, my community newspaper generally does a good job of presenting both sides.	.80
My community newspaper sometimes places too much emphasis on the public office the editor holds.	.68
My community newspaper reports news that is critical of or unfavorable to the community's major industry.	.20[c]
My community newspaper is used at times to advance the political views of its editor with regard to his public office.	.75
My community newspaper presents a fair and balanced account of political races in which the editor is a candidate for public office.	.71
My community newspaper often fails to report on controversial local issues.	.59
Owning a community newspaper and serving as its editor can be a problem for a person who also holds public office by creating conflicts brought on by holding both jobs.	-.52
My community newspaper sometimes gets involved in issues that are best left to public officials to decide.	.38
The fact that the editor holds public office can affect the prominence or position a story about that office receives in my community newspaper.	.69
The editor of my community newspaper writes more for his political constituents than for his readers.	.83
The editor of my community newspaper is performing well in his role as editor even though there may be conflicts brought on by his serving as a public official.	.79

(Continued)

TABLE ONE

(continued)

[a] Scoring of items with negative sign was reversed in final computation of the index.

[b] Pearson's R. All values significant at 0.01 level, except as in note c.

[c] Significant at 0.05 level.

among towns or among role types did not differ from what might have occurred by chance--was rejected in both cases, at the $p=.05$ level. In short, the pattern of rank score distribution indicates that there were significant differences in SRI scores among role groups and among towns.

// Table Two about here //

Next, post hoc comparisons, examining between-town and between-role differences in sums of ranks by a transformation to values of Z (as described by Gibbons[66]), were used to identify significant differences.

Across all five towns, the Political Opponent groups were the most negative in evaluating local newspaper performance, and were significantly more negative than Professionals, consistently the most positive overall in rank position. Perhaps more telling is the narrow range of Political Opponent group scores across towns: the difference between high and low ratings was only 10.7 SRI units, while for Professionals the range was 25.7.

While News Media representative groups were comparatively more critical than all but Political Opponent groups, these differences were not significant. News Media groups' SRI scores were also tightly patterned, with a range of 14.3.

But notice how Blue Collar groups, whose rank position ranged from "1" in Golconda to "5" in Cullman, had the greatest dispersion of SRI scores (26 SRI units). Advertiser groups also had a comparatively broad range (22.7). The generally

TABLE TWO

Mean Rating of Local Press on Social Responsibility Index[a] (SRI), By Role and By Town

Role:[b] / Town:[c]	Professionals	Blue Collar	Advertisers	News Media	Political Opponent	Rank Sum by Town[d]
Jackson	37.7	33.0	31.0	42.7	47.0	6[f,g]
Warsaw	31.0	37.7	39.0	43.7	50.3	10[h]
Clinton	41.0	42.7	42.7	46.0	48.7	14
Golconda	46.7	45.0	53.0	53.0	56.7	20[g]
Cullman	56.7	59.0	53.7	57.0	57.7	25[f,h]
Rank Sum by Role[e]	9.0[i]	12.5	11.0	19.0	23.5[i]	

a The higher the value of the SRI--and the rank sum generated from means--the less responsible the paper.

b Value of X^2 for Friedman's two-way analysis of variance by ranks of roles = 12.12, p = .02. The ranks of mean SRI scores under each role heading are significantly different from a chance distribution.

c Value of X^2 for Friedman's two-way analysis of variance by ranks of towns = 18.56, p = .001. The ranks of mean SRI scores within each town row are significantly different from a chance distribution.

d This is a sum of the ranks assigned SRI means from a particular town, and provides a comparative measure of towns' tendencies to rate high or low on the SRI, regardless of role of rater.

e This is a sum of the ranks assigned SRI means from a particular role group, and provides a comparative measure of groups' tendencies to rate high or low on the SRI, regardless of town of rater.

f,g,h,i Rank sums with common superscripts differ significantly by the Z-test (p = .05).

positive Professional groups, however, had a comparatively narrow range of 15.7.

What do these ranges indicate? We might interpret the comparatively narrow ranges of scores of News Media groups and Political Opponent groups as evidence that within each role there is a shared or common view of the press, on the one hand, or of "fairness" in political opposition per se, on the other hand (e.g., to news people, the dual roles of publisher and official represent a compromise of journalistic ethics or principles, while for office-seekers the dual roles represent an unfair advantage for adversaries).

Conversely, might the wide range of group scores for other roles (Advertiser and Blue Collar) be seen as indicating the absence of a similar "group norm" in regard to the dual roles of publisher and official?

These interpretations, of course, are quite tentative, based as they are on these limited data, and are meant to be suggestive.

Among towns--and ignoring role differences--there were several significant differences. The local newspaper in Jackson (and its publisher-official) was viewed as most responsible, significantly moreso than papers in Golconda and Cullman, which was also significantly less responsible than the Warsaw paper.

Visual inspection of Table Two suggests that the town "factor" influences SRI ratings more than does the role "factor." The narrowest range of SRI scores was within Cullman--5.3 SRI points between the highest and lowest roles--while the

widest range was within Warsaw--19.3 points. By contrast, recall that the widest range within roles (i.e., the effect of the town "factor") was 26 SRI points and the narrowest was 10.7. There is greater homogeneity--or unanimity--within towns than within roles.

But how do these officials rate their own news operations on the SRI? Loosely borrowing a methodological perspective from the coorientation studies of Chaffee and McLeod,[67] Table Three contrasts publisher-officials' ratings of themselves with the aggregate ratings from the samples of their reader/constituents.

// Table Three about here //

Clearly, these publisher-officials see themselves and/or their papers performing more responsibly than do their readers. The more positive the SRI ratings of citizens, the smaller the gap or difference between those ratings and the self-ratings of the publisher-official. The SRI score of the official who rates himself most negatively (in Cullman) is still almost 19 SRI points more positive than the score for the Cullman citizen sample.

At this point, it is worth restating the results of the SRI analysis. First, Political Opponents were the most negative in evaluating their local newspaper, while Professionals were most positive. News Media representatives were also negative and, like Political Opponents, exhibited a narrow range of SRI scores across towns. This narrowness or within-role group similarity of response suggests a strong group norm disap-

TABLE THREE

Mean Publisher-official Self-ratings and Composite Reader Ratings on the Social Responsibility Index[a] (SRI), by Town

Town:	How Publishers Rate Themselves	Rating Difference	How Readers Rate Editors
Jackson	33.0	5.3	38.3
Warsaw	31.0	9.3	40.3
Clinton	31.0	13.2	44.2
Golconda	32.0	18.9	50.9
Cullman	38.0	18.8	56.8

[a] The higher the mean SRI score, the less responsible the performance.

proving the dual roles in question.

There were also clear differences among towns. And narrowness of News Media and Political Opponent response ranges notwithstanding, there was greater homogeneity within towns than within roles.

While Tables Two and Three thus illuminate the similarities and differences among towns and roles in terms of a common scale, these empirical data represent the fruit of only one part of a multi-method approach. The SRI's greatest utility may be as a heuristic used in conjunction with the results of the depth interviews that are themselves part of the following Case Studies.

Case Study No. 1: The Benton County Enterprise

In brief: The Enterprise was rated second-best on the SRI, with its most supportive role group the Professionals. Although some interviewed suggested that the paper reflects the views of an "elite" group of influential citizens, others suggest that the councilman/publisher's use of humor, the fact that his office-holding has resulted in better news coverage of government, and his efforts to provide diverse viewpoints, all combine to make him an exception to a general principle they embrace: office-holders should not control newspapers.

Warsaw, Missouri, is a town of 1,494 in the Ozark foothills. The local Benton County Enterprise has been published for 26 years by Mahlon K. White, 49, known to Benton County residents as "Jab," through his weekly, front-page column, "Jab's Gab."

A college graduate with English and psychology majors, White is serving his seventh consecutive two-year term on the Warsaw City Council and his third three-year term as member of the Warsaw Board of Education.

Both offices are elective and non-salaried. Elected president of the council, White also serves that body as police commissioner.

White devotes a great deal of time to the community and is active in the Warsaw Chamber of Commerce, industrial development board, and local planning and zoning commissions.

Journalism and office-holding are long-time White family callings. His father (also an editor and publisher), his grandfather and his great-grandfather served their communities, "on various boards, and apparently felt, as I do, a commitment to the community."

The great-grandfather, Thomas Benton White, founded the Enterprise in 1881 after work as a reporter for the Denver Post. The patriarch also owned the Clinton Daily Democrat, now edited by his grand-daughter and published by his daughter-in-law and his grandson, who is mayor of the city of Clinton, Missouri (see Case Study No. 4).

White, who succeeded his father as Enterprise publisher, described his father as a "tough act to follow." According to White, his father--onetime president of the Warsaw School Board, president of the Chamber of Commerce, and member of various other community organizations--served as (his) a model.

In fact, when Missouri Secretary of State Jimmy Kirkpatrick, himself publisher of the nearby Windsor weekly newspaper,

warned against Mahlon White's simultaneously serving as publisher and official, "He said he didn't know how anyone could handle both roles, but I told him my Dad had done it," White said.

White said he ran for public office with the best intentions. "I didn't have an axe to grind," he said. He has considered seeking higher office--mayor. "Maybe after my children are out of school," he said.

However, White doubts the present form of government will last in Warsaw. With the development of a lake and the construction of a dam and multi-million dollar visitors' center near town, an increased workload on city officials has necessitated three or four additional council meetings per month. "Our mayor devotes thirty to forty hours a week to his office, and when he retires we're going to need a city administrator," White said.

White, the publisher, sees positive value in his holding public office. "It gives me more insight into what's going on than the average publisher gets," he said. Still, White thinks that only a native could do what he has done in "clannish" Warsaw. "It could only work here if you were a native, didn't have an abrasive personality, and knew the makeup of the board on which you sat."

White says "togetherness" and cooperative spirit are evident among council members and school board members. "We're all businessmen on the city board, and on the school board we're all kindred in thoughts, so far as education is concerned," he said.

White claims no conflict of interest in his covering the school board and council meetings, which are also covered by a nearby community's paper (although headquartered 35 miles away, the paper "loves to dig things up" in Warsaw, White said) and a local radio station. The fact that both school board and council positions are non-salaried, he said, helps him remain objective. And, White points out, lucrative job printing for both the school system and city are not done by White, but are "farmed out" to out-of-town firms. "All we do is run the legal ads."

And, whenever either body meets in executive session, White said, he takes no notes of the meeting. "During an executive session my role is that of a board member," he said.

However, when he was first elected to public office, certain board members asked White to withhold stories, a request he denied. "They no longer ask," he said.

Does White consider himself a "watchdog" over local government? Not "unless it's some county official that you catch in malfeasance." White sees his paper's role as covering meetings that would not otherwise be covered and would only write editorials about the school board or city government if they were upbeat in tone.

Admitting that "it is hard for me to be critical of townspeople and survive," White also said that he treats information that he is privy to as a public official differently than other journalists might:

> If funds are not concrete for a project,
> I will sit back on a story. A case in

> point is our harbor area. I didn't publish anything until the Corps of Engineers and Congress agreed that it would be a reality. I didn't print anything because the project hadn't been cinched yet. I think that journalists jump the gun sometimes. Today, some people don't view journalists as they did thirty or forty years ago. Just look at the rankings of occupations. Journalism doesn't rank where it once did.

White said that school board stories are the most difficult for him to write and that he avoids bylining his accounts of meetings. This precaution, and the practice of having another staffer cover the meetings, developed during a period when White's wife taught in the school system.

And, White added, members of the two boards on which he serves keep him in check. "My peers who serve on these boards are close friends, and they wouldn't tolerate any grandstanding if I tried it," he said.

A staunch Democrat, White sometimes pokes fun at Republicans in his front-page column. His ability to deftly handle humor may be one reason why many of his readers describe him as likeable. Still, not everyone agrees. Several readers derisively described White as a member of Warsaw's "ruling class" who will withhold certain stories. Regardless, evidence exists in the Enterprise which suggests that White accepts alternative ideas in his newspaper. Letters to the editor have been criti-

cal of the Enterprise coverage of local high school baseball and of a county official, and a front page article entitled "Harbor Hot Potato for Warsaw Board" apparently presented both sides to a controversial issue facing the Warsaw City Council.

The Reaction of Readers

Twelve of the fifteen readers interviewed thought White was doing a good job as editor, but despite the evaluation, one Advertiser said, "I have heard a lot of people say that he should do one thing or the other, but not both." Another Advertiser, who strongly endorsed White's editorship, added: "Owning the paper and serving in office works well in this case because Jab uses the paper to better the community; he wouldn't have to use the newspaper to his advantage. He grew up here, his roots are here, his children go to school here, and he looks out for the well-being of the community."

Another Advertiser was complimentary, claiming White's dual roles had improved news coverage in Warsaw. "Jab is a sharp man who can express himself, but before he was elected to the school board he rarely came to board meetings. At least now we are getting the news from the school board meetings."

A Professional told a similar story: "Before Jab was on the city council, we had very little newspaper coverage of city meetings. Now we have better coverage of what goes on in the city because he's at council meetings."

But one local News Media representative worried about quality (and not just increased quantity) of coverage, arguing that, "When Jab knows that the council is moving on something, he'll give the council version moreso than another reporter

might. He expresses the council's views, but he doesn't go out of his way to report the other side unless it is a major issue and he finds it unavoidable to print both sides."

In fact, interviews with Warsaw citizens found considerable difference in perception of White's coverage--or non-coverage--of controversy.

While several readers said that White does publish news about local controversial issues, one Advertiser, a political ally of White's, said that he knew of "a couple of exceptions," where White had backed away from or delayed publication of controversial issues. He cited one case in which the story revealing that a former Warsaw city clerk had allegedly embezzled city funds appeared in the Sedalia newspaper before it appeared in the Enterprise.

A Blue Collar worker added: "The story about the city clerk was on the streets a month before it hit the Sedalia paper, and it was another month before it was in Jab's paper." Another Blue Collar worker said that White runs a "nice" newspaper. "He doesn't stir up any hornet's nests; he knows his place," the Blue Collar worker said.

A News Media representative condemned what he saw as evidence of conflict of interest due to White's holding of multiple roles: a lack of willingness to investigate news leads. "You are not going to go out and dig up stuff on board members who are also your friends," he said. "Besides, the Enterprise publishes hospital reports, not investigative reports." Another News Media person expressed doubts whether White reports news objectively:

> Consider a case where it is in the city's best interest to raise taxes and the whole town is against it. A publisher can put information out about the need to raise taxes or he can suppress information. Either way, it opens up an area for abuse. What happens is that the system of checks and balances is taken away when the publisher is in public office. And in small towns the newspaper can be the only check.

Another News Media representative said:

> As an editor, it's too easy to control dissemination of news. The press tells the public what public officials are doing, but in this case the gatekeeper is the public official who can decide whether it's in his best interests to disseminate the news.

What continually cropped up, however, were references to the city council's perceived resistance to change and statements of dislike for a small nucleus of leaders--a Warsaw "ruling class"--which some readers saw as the main pocket of resistance to change. A Blue Collar worker said that while the city council was opposed to development of a harbor adjacent to the Warsaw business district, most downtown merchants supported the development.

"Warsaw is an old, country-type town that resists change,"

the Blue Collar worker said. "But the town could use the harbor to bring people and money in. Jab has too much pull with his offices and the paper. Even though the council hasn't decided what to do, Jab keeps up with the little knocks against the harbor in his paper. Those little knocks will add up and hurt the merchants in the end."

Yet one Advertiser complained that White's paper lacks editorial vigor and that White rarely takes editorial stances. "I wish he'd write more editorials," said the Advertiser, a political ally of White's.

A Professional said that White is successful as an editor because he is a "low-key individual who doesn't rock the boat." Another Professional said that White apparently handles his multiple roles with little conflict because "he bends over backwards since he knows people are concerned about possible conflicts." This pattern, the Professional said, has resulted in less enthusiastic coverage of school board bond issues than before he was elected to the school board and publishing too many comments that are critical of the school system.

But as the earlier analysis of SRI ratings indicated, not everyone saw the conflict in terms of journalistic ethics or principles.

A Political Opponent objected to White's remaining in office term after term and using his newspaper to political advantage.

> Sure there's a conflict of interest in serving on the council, the school board, and owning the paper. He gets free pol-

itical advertising, doesn't he? The major conflict is holding office for so long. When people hold office for as long as Jab has, they get too obligated to each other. They start scratching each other's backs. One votes for the other's bills.

While most readers gave White good marks as editor, the main complaint about his editorship was, as a Blue Collar worker said, that, "He writes for the upper class, for people in authority." Still, his success appears to be fashioned by a deft use of humor and by apparent attention given to providing a "marketplace" of ideas. A Political Opponent explained:

> Jab admits he's for the Democrats, but he does it in good humor. He takes a certain amount of razzing over it, but he always plays things low key. In his news stories he tries to present both sides. Maybe that means he stays on the fence. Probably, that's the way a publisher has to do it in a small town.

Finally, eleven of the fifteen readers said it was not a good idea for public officials to own and edit newspapers although twelve of the fifteen thought White handled his multiple roles well. Nor did White think it was a good idea; he strongly disagreed with the principle of public officials in general serving as editors.

A News Media representative sounded this warning:

Generally, it is not a good idea to do both. I can see where certain circumstances can cause real conflicts to develop. But I think Jab is handling it as well as it can be handled, even though tomorrow could be an entirely different story.

Case Study No. 2: The Jackson Cash-Book Journal

In brief: Enjoying the best rating on the SRI of the sampled papers--including the most favorable given by any of the News Media representatives or Political Opponents in all five case studies--the Jackson paper has a legislator/publisher who promises, and delivers, a "good news" newspaper. The emphasis is clearly on the positive. Despite evidence that he occasionally uses the paper to promote himself, many point to his effectiveness as a legislator, and the distance between "home" and statehouse as factors that reduce fears of any conflict of interest.

Marvin E. Proffer, co-publisher of the Cash-Book Journal, one of Missouri's largest weeklies, did not plan a newspaper career. But after his wife's grandfather--a newspaper publisher--was killed in a 1955 accident, Proffer began working at the newspaper, selling insurance, and managing a movie theater. "I worked seven straight years averaging one hundred and seven hours a week," he said.

The 54-year-old legislator, who is serving his twelfth term in the Missouri General Assembly, earned a degree at Southeast Missouri State, where he played varsity football, and a master's degree in educational administration from the University of Missouri-Columbia. Prior to 1955, his plans were to work toward a doctorate and to become a college athletic director.

In Jackson, Proffer's interest in city government developed and grew. Proffer sought and won a seat on the city council, covering council meetings for the newspaper while he

sat on the council.

Proffer in 1960 ran for the state legislature and lost, but in 1962 he defeated the incumbent Republican. He has since won twelve successive trips to the legislature, drawing either little or no opposition.

In 1964 Proffer and his wife sold the newspaper, but four years later they repurchased it. Other benchmarks for the Journal included adding a co-publisher, merging with a second Jackson newspaper in 1979, and hiring the paper's first editor in 1983. The latter was prompted by increased legislative duties for Proffer.

Today, Proffer carries a heavy legislative and newspaper workload, serving as House budget committee chairman and, even during legislative session, spending thirty to forty hours each weekend at the newspaper. Between sessions, he covers meetings and sports events, writes a legislative column and occasional editorials, and meets with advertisers.

Separating the publisher and public official roles is especially difficult, Proffer said. "I always have two hats on when I go to cover a meeting or an event," he said. "But I try to downplay the political side when I cover things."

In fact, when the Journal carries announcements of his intentions to run for re-election, "Some people tell me that I don't toot my own horn enough," he said. Still, "I always find myself shaking hands and greeting people as I cover things for the newspaper."

Thoughts of running for higher office have crossed Proffer's and others' minds, as recently as the last state sena-

torial election in his district. He said he had "every intention to run" had the incumbent not decided to seek re-election. Proffer has been encouraged to run for national and higher state offices, but has declined because he's "not enthused about spending a year campaigning and raising funds."

Still, the budget committee chairmanship consumed so much of his time that Proffer hired an editor in 1983. Prior to that, Proffer covered public body meetings for the newspaper, and he or his co-publisher covered issue stories. Today, Proffer avoids stories in which he is involved. "If I feel I can't be objective, I have someone on the staff cover a story," he said.

Nor does he make a practice of editing staff-written stories. "I try not to take away a staff member's initiative by editing stories," he said. "Otherwise you would kill their enthusiasm."

Proffer claims that his newspaper acts as a "watchdog," particularly on the activities of Missouri Gov. Christopher Bond. But he says the Journal is not an "attack newspaper" and that he tries to use a "positive approach" in reporting, and in his weekly legislative column. He avoids, he added, using his column for political gain.

> I view my role with the governor as one of being a watchdog. We disagree on things and if I disagree with the governor, I let it be known. I try to be factual and to print the truth. I point out the 'why' behind issues, but if I

> have a strong point of view, I will stress it in the column.

Proffer also considers himself a watchdog of local government, even though the examples he cites are of controversial issues in the 1950s, when he first took ownership of the paper. He admits that "direct involvement with people" causes problems with trying to be a watchdog at the local level, as does his interest in "positive" news coverage.

> We try to build rather than tear down. We try to point out the good things in Jackson rather than put sordid headlines and build up the bad. We don't place much emphasis on the negative, but that doesn't mean we don't cover a murder or a drug bust. Our policy is to talk more about the good things. That may not be exciting, but we try not to overplay bad news.

Actual examination of copies of the Journal reveals it as indeed a "good news" newspaper. And as Proffer claimed, coverage of state government is extensive. But examination also reveals that Proffer's agenda of state issues is sometimes apparent in front page stories, and if the issue is a major one, he will address it in his legislative column.

Yet he seeks diversity. In one edition, the controversial issue of adoption of a state lottery was a lead story in the Journal, and the story solicited letters from readers for a future page dealing with that issue. Proffer, who ardently

supported a state lottery, nonetheless included in the same edition a column by the Missouri state treasurer who spelled out his opposition to the lottery.

Proffer apparently also tries to keep his name and photograph high on readers' agendas. In one edition, the weekly Journal carried three front-page stories on the legislature (one headline, "Proffer reflects on session, lauds unemployment bill," had the publisher "lauding" an unemployment bill he sponsored). The same edition included four other state government articles and Proffer's "Legislative Report" column. Finally, the Journal used a photograph of Proffer and the governor with a caption that said the governor was congratulating the Jackson legislator after signing a Proffer-sponsored bill to set up performance evaluation for state employees.

Proffer's published columns supported his claim that he carefully evaluates the governor's performance. He wrote:

> The state is hurting and it takes intestinal fortitude to face up to the issues. I am well aware that, as a result of the economic times and the governor continually telling everyone that we need to cut the fat out of the budget and get the delinquent taxes, that it seems that the state would be in good condition. We've been led down the wrong path.

Yet Proffer also uses his column to pursue his goal of emphasizing "positive news" involving state government. In another column, he wrote:

> State government demands a positive attitude to succeed. I've heard the bad over and over again, but there is much on the positive side and it should be heard. Over the next few months I am going to discuss the agencies of government and what has been done in recent years that is positive, and I am proud to have been part of the leadership to have helped make these decisions.

Proffer avoids involvement in local politics by not participating in county or city government, and the Journal avoids political endorsements. "We think people should sell themselves," Proffer said.

Despite the decision not to make political endorsements, the Journal once published a letter from a legislative colleague which paid high tribute to Proffer:

> I have admired his conservatism...and yet he has the good, sound judgment to support new programs that are for the welfare of our great state. He has always been an ardent supporter of education and of those programs that are needed by the people of his district who have so wisely chosen him to represent them...Missouri needs men like him who are conscientious...never have I been more impressed by anyone than Marvin...I feel proud to

have had the privilege to serve with him.

The letter, which was published, incidentally, at about the same time that Proffer announced his bid to seek re-election to the House, was in the Journal less than a month after Proffer's opponent in the House race announced his candidacy. However, Proffer allowed his opponent a front page announcement and an opportunity to criticize his performance in the Missouri General Assembly.

The Reaction of Readers

Journal readers were generally pleased with Proffer's work as editor, an approval evidenced by his positive SRI rating across role groups. Several were quick to compare Proffer's performance with that of Gary Rust, a former state representative who served simultaneously as a newspaper publisher in nearby Cape Girardeau.

"Gary Rust's writing had a slant; he promoted himself and his ideas through his newspaper," a Professional said. "Marvin doesn't use his paper the way Gary did." Another Professional added, "Marvin doesn't use his newspaper as a pulpit."

An Advertiser who spends $1,000 weekly on the Journal agreed. "Marvin has never used the paper to create a better image for himself," he said. Another Advertiser said Proffer succeeds because "he doesn't make himself out to be a hero." A Blue Collar worker said Proffer is successful in both roles because he works hard. "Either Marvin or (co-publisher) Gerald Jones will get out at anytime day or night and take a picture of a fish someone has caught, and he'll speak anywhere he's asked to speak," he said.

But not all readers were convinced that Proffer can perform both roles without the potential for conflict. Proffer, the politician, himself suggested negative electoral consequences of owning the paper:

> People joke and say that I have no problems because the newspaper is always on my side. But that can work to my advantage as well as to my disadvantage because when you own a newspaper you are always going to make some people happy and some mad.

A Political Opponent--one of the few people who found fault with Proffer's job as publisher--said the Journal is a hometown "booster." Because Proffer's attitude is one of "our team, our city," the Political Opponent said, Proffer would not be a good publisher even if he were not in public office. The Political Opponent said that Proffer does not use the paper to espouse his political views as much as for "name recognition."

Two News Media representatives described the Journal as "innocuous" and as a "non-entity." One said, "People don't want such a flood of news from Jefferson City (state capital) as Marvin gives them. He'd do better to publish pictures of winners from a photo contest at Wal-mart and cut a state government story from forty to twenty inches." The other News Media representative noted that the Journal rarely becomes involved in local controversy.

The last time Proffer was personally involved in controversy was in 1976 when he ran for House Speaker and lost, the

News Media representative said. "He was stripped of his committee assignments and was bitterly antagonistic in his paper," he said. "He minced no words. It was a blood feud."

A Professional described Proffer as a "maverick" who does not get involved with county or city politics. "He's always been more for himself," he said. "Marvin boosts Marvin Proffer in his newspaper, but it doesn't seem like it's for political gain."

A Political Opponent said that Proffer's ownership of the newspaper has allowed him "subtle advantages" which he said have been used for both personal and political gain. Access to lists of names has given Proffer an advantage over the years, he said.

"Marvin uses lists of graduates and honor students to mail congratulatory letters or state publications," the opponent said. "He uses the newspaper as a public relations tool. There's hardly anyone in his district who hasn't received some item of personal mail at some point in time."

Furthermore, the opponent said that "Proffer or his staff won't hesitate to add his name to a news story even if he is only remotely connected with it." Finally, the opponent said that he thinks Proffer and his staff are aware of the advantage he holds and that they work hard to guard against any overuse of the advantage which might minimize the value of owning the paper.

A Professional, however, said readers see no conflict because "they are well aware that Marvin is a public official and consequently read what he writes with a grain of salt."

And, he said, the Journal has a "limited sphere of influence" because of two other newspapers at nearby Cape Girardeau. "I think the papers in Cape watch what Marv is doing," he added.

On the other hand, a News Media representative said he thinks Proffer handles both roles without sensing much conflict because his political office is secure.

> Marvin doesn't use his paper or his column for political gain. Instead, he sees himself as a businessman and a state legislator who just happens to earn a living by publishing a newspaper. In fact, he may even have scruples about using the newspaper as a political organ.

An opposite view was presented by another News Media representative, who said:

> If a paper is to function as a watchdog, there is a fundamental problem with having a publisher who is actively participating in government and also directing that newspaper's editorial product. There are too many temptations to influence the readers if you are directly involved in the legislative process. A lot of people in newspaper work are high-minded, but when it comes to a close call, I think the temptation may be too great.

The same news representative agreed that part of the

reason why Proffer is successful at both jobs is that he is perceived as an extremely effective legislator. "He's a very popular guy who won a standing round of applause at the end of the last legislative session," he said. A Blue Collar worker said, "The legislature named him one of the Top Ten Legislators, and those were his peers. If he's good enough for them, he's good enough for me." An Advertiser said, "I think Marvin would make a good governor, and I'm not even a Democrat." Another said, "In Jackson everybody knows everybody else. People feel like they've known Marvin from the day he was born. If he had not been doing things right all these years, people would have voted him out."

But despite the general satisfaction with Proffer specifically, most readers said that, placed in the wrong hands, a newspaper owned and edited by a public official could be misused. A Blue Collar worker said:

> I think it all depends on who the person is. I can't say I'd like all papers to be published by politicians. I think the more newspapers we had that were published by politicians the worse off we'd be. If you had all the newspapers owned by politicians, then you wouldn't have anyone left to challenge the politicians.

Yet another reader, a Professional, said that distance may be a factor in Proffer's success, explaining that the editor's state office seems, in a very real sense, far removed from local government in Jackson. And yet, Proffer continues to maintain

a "homegrown" image. "Marvin was born and raised here and that makes a difference," an Advertiser said. "All I know is that what Marvin is doing works, because sometimes I have to fill the newspaper rack in my lobby twice a week."

Still, there are reservations. An Advertiser cautioned: "It's a good idea to have a public official as publisher in Marvin's case, but in the next town the case may be different."

Case Study No. 3: The Cullman Tribune

In brief: For all role categories, the Cullman, Alabama, Tribune was rated low in responsibility on the SRI. The publisher has long used the newspaper as a vehicle for attacks, though not on political opponents so much as on--what he sees as--the politicized "other" newspaper in town. He claims to offer a forum for views, but in essence fills that forum with his own views. Somewhat surprising is the negative SRI rating among Blue Collar workers, a role group typically providing a comparatively more positive rating. Cullman Blue Collar workers are more negative on the SRI than other Cullman groups and other towns' Blue Collar citizens.

In October 1982, the weekly 108-year-old Cullman Tribune was a badly listing ship of a newspaper. However, Tribune columnist Raymond Clarke helped buy the newspaper in order to revive it, and to keep Cullman from becoming a "one-newspaper" town.

Like his co-owner (Terry Smith), Clarke was a fulltime employee of the Cullman City School system. A fixture on the editorial page since 1974, Clarke the publisher had begun his

second year as Cullman High School principal, while Smith served as an elementary school principal. Clarke was also a Cullman City Council member, elected in 1980.

Cullman, a city of 13,084 forty-four miles north of Birmingham, is a two-newspaper town. The second newspaper--the daily Cullman Times--had long been a target of Clarke's. He viewed the Tribune as the only viable alternative to the Times, and he intended to speak out to the Tribune's 5,500 subscribers.

The 45-year old Democrat first spoke through the news media in 1974, when embroiled in a debate over introduction of a new math program in the elementary school which he served as principal. Clarke felt he needed a platform to rebut a number of critics whose charges were fueled by extensive coverage--much of it unfavorable--provided by the Times. Grady Griffin, then Tribune publisher, asked Clarke to write a weekly column. Seizing the opportunity, Clarke began an eight-year-long campaign against what he called "slanted and distorted" accounts of school issues by the Times.

During the years Clarke authored his column, his opinionated writing about subjects in which he had a vested interest hardly went unnoticed. Few people remained neutral about the school issue, and when school problems became as much political as educational issues, few were surprised when he ran for city council.

Townspeople asked: Once elected, would Clarke continue to write? The answer was soon in coming. He would.

Next, Clarke bought the Tribune, polarizing public opinion

and heightening public debate. His critics grew in number, yet he was buoyed by a group of supporters, many of whom had been stung by the "opposition paper," the Times.

Clarke's job as an educator demands most of his time, but with the assumption of the city council seat, new demands were placed on him. "Time is a critical factor with three jobs going," he said. "But I give top priority to the school job. I absolutely refuse to go to the newspaper office during the day." Clarke hired an editor and a reporter to handle news, but, of necessity, had to spend many nights and almost every weekend at the Tribune office. On the other hand, he said council business can be "spliced in" as time permits because that job is parttime. However, he said that during the council's annual budget deliberations, time becomes an especially critical factor. "I just try not to let the job at school suffer," he said, "but there are those who argue that it does suffer."

When his son asks him where he is going on a given night, "My usual response is that I have some kind of meeting to attend--city council, PTA, gas board, planning commission, power board, finance committee, street committee, community development, school board, football or basketball game, high school dance, or Kiwanis Club."

Clarke admits he is not a journalist. His expertise lies in education. He has done some work toward a doctorate in education, has authored a book on his innovative elementary education programs, and has been recognized as one of Alabama's outstanding educators. He says he "sort of stumbled" into the

newspaper business:

> When I saw the Tribune going under, I knew my sounding board would be gone. I wanted a forum, and I wanted the Tribune to be an alternative voice. I was not going to be silenced.

And silenced he was not. From the start, Clarke expressed his views on his favorite subjects--school and city matters. Furthermore, he placed himself in a watchdog's role, although he turned the function upside-down by primarily watching, not the government, but the daily newspaper! Clarke said he asked himself, "Who is to watch the news media if they abuse their power?"

Clarke does, however, see his paper as performing something of a watchdog's role over local government. He noted that he had criticized city and county government leaders, including council members Larry Entrekin and Jean Deese. "It has become an adversary relationship between Larry and Jean and myself," Clarke said. "Our working relationship has been difficult because I've called their hand in the newspaper." Still, Clarke has refrained from criticizing most local government leaders. "When it comes time to turn the heat on someone, a friend, I've wondered about that. I still like to think I'd be objective, but I don't really know if I can."

Clarke also said that he firmly believes that "all sides to an issue should be heard." In practice, however, that philosophy has sometimes fallen short. For example, Clarke and his co-publisher could not agree on coverage of Cullman's

industrial park and the future of industrial development in the Cullman area. Clarke wanted to boost industrial development, while his co-publisher wanted to criticize expenditures at the industrial park by city government. The co-publisher left the newspaper.

In addition, Clarke said he gives his newspaper staff "pretty much a free hand" in what they write, although he warned that "my writers know who is boss." Clarke said he has changed staff-written stories, once amending a headline from "City Debates Bond Issue" to "City Gets A-1 Bond Rating." He said, "I thought the bond rating was more important than the debate." Emphasis on the positive, particularly in stories on city schools and city government, is a recurrent Clarke theme.

While Clarke bought the Tribune in order to continue his crusade against the Times and to maintain an open forum, he said his decision to get involved in city government was prompted by observing the city council's dealings with school matters. "I saw decisions the council was making with regard to city schools that I thought were wrong," he said. "So I got into politics to change the direction of those decisions." That move to become involved has been fraught with problems for Clarke, primarily because the council appoints members to the city's Board of Education and appropriates funds to schools.

Most recently, Clarke created a stir by voting on a school board appointment--in effect, voting for his own employer. While he had previously abstained from such votes, "I saw an attempt to stack the board, so I voted."

The Times reported that a "bitter feud erupted" between

Clarke and two city council members over his vote on the school board appointment. Describing the voting by Clarke and council president Don Green--a teacher at Cullman High School--the Times wrote:

> That action by the two councilmen-educators was widely criticized. Opponents claimed the two educators were trying to use their spots on the council to benefit them in their fulltime jobs. Both Clarke and Green were appointed by the school board to their positions. Despite the criticism, the two educators refused to bow out of the school board selection process.

Although on the one hand the Alabama attorney general issued an opinion that Clarke "certainly should not be able to vote on the appointment of those who employ him," Clarke cited the state's Ethics Commission opinion that it was not a violation of the state's ethics law for him to vote on school board matters.

Soon after acquiring the Tribune Clarke expressed concern over his dual roles. In the first issue under his co-ownership, the Tribune reported that the two school principals-publishers "want it made clear from the start that this new endeavor will not interfere with their jobs in the school system." The Tribune also reported in Clarke's column that "it will be our policy to report the news--not make it."

But by the second issue, the composite Clarke portrait had

begun to emerge. He wrote in his column:

> We go down to Cullman City Hall on Monday nights to work on various problems facing the city. In the back of everyone's mind, we are apprehensive about what we are going to be clobbered with by the press the next day. No matter how much good comes ouf of the meeting, you can rest assured that the negative aspects, no matter how insignificant it may have been, will be sprawled across the headlines.

In another early issue Clarke's column topic was city schools. He wrote about Cullman High's demerit system in a column entitled "CHS Demerit System a Success." Clarke was architect of the system.

In the same issue the lead story was "Drug Problems Here Could Soon Be History," an accounting of city school progress in fighting drug abuse. Principal sources for the story? Cullman Police Chief Roy Wood and Raymond Clarke. Said Wood: "We are not in as bad shape as some other areas, thanks to school officials like Mr. Clarke, who stays on top of it." Wood in turn was primary source for a front-page story on burglaries, complimenting the chief for being "on top of crime in Cullman." Such mutual back-patting became routine as part of the Tribune's course of reporting good news.

But self-promotion of Clarke the principal remained secondary to Clarke the journalist's primary goal: taking the Times

to task. Announcing a plan to author a second opinion column when events merited, he wrote:

> EDITOR'S NOTE: The Cullman Tribune cannot compete with the Cullman Times in reporting. However, we will do much more in-depth analysis. I am starting this column for the purpose of keeping the people apprised of the workings of city and council government. It will also be used to help pull city and county governing bodies together in a more cooperative effort and to point out to the people efforts of any other section of the news media who (sic) might attempt to drive a wedge between the two governmental agencies.

And occasionally, the Tribune as watchdog might have been accused of losing sight of the consequences of specific news events. For example,

> This series of articles on industry is designed to promote a more positive environment. As the idea gains momentum, you can rest assured that the other newspaper in Cullman will take note and it will begin to have an impact on their (sic) policies. We want to prove to them that Cullman will support a positive newspaper. You, the people, know that the

> kind of reporting in the Times must be checked.

While Clarke plainly uses his newspaper to his advantage at times, he said he refuses to use his position in city government "to scoop" the Times. Again the Times is a target: Clarke claims the "insider's" position was abused when Times reporter Charlotte Miller, first woman elected to the Cullman City Council, used her public post to get early breaks on stories.

Does Clarke see any problems with his own multiple roles?

> I like to think that I'm objective enough to serve on the council and tell my reporters to report objectively or to hit me between the eyes. I have asked myself, "Am I doing it as all pro-city government?" I'm human. I'm conscious of it, and if I knew there would be fair reporting, I would pull out. I realize my family is coming up on the short end. I have two kids, one eight and one ten. I need to spend more time with both of them.

The Reaction of Readers

Many of the Tribune readers interviewed said Clarke's performance as publisher was affected by his public official and educator roles. A Professional said the Tribune is "more like a newsletter that a politician sends out than it is like a newspaper. He states his position and tells us why he voted on

things. I don't think being an editor was his calling. He never intended to establish an impartial paper."

But even though most readers were critical of Clarke's performance as publisher, most of them expressed a genuine liking for Clarke as an individual and several said he was an excellent school administrator. One Professional labeled Clarke "a good fellow" and "basically a good elementary school principal," and a Political Opponent said Clarke is "a nice guy. I like him personally. But the newspaper is an ego trip."

A News Media representative said:

> Raymond is trying to run a 'state' newspaper where he will only present the council's side. Cullman would suffer if it had only one paper and it was run by a person with Raymond's attitude.

Readers were quick to point out real or potential conflicts of interest for Clarke. One Professional said that anything Clarke was involved in would be "up front" in the Tribune. "He played up his role in cleaning up a bunch of old tires and then filling in the landfill with them," the Professional said. "It was played up like he was a knight in shining armor and had rid the city of an eyesore."

A News Media representative who said Clarke "doesn't run a newspaper, (H)e runs an alleged newspaper," claimed that Clarke's dual roles represent "a basic conflict of interest." Generally, he said:

> Government and the press need to be sepa-

> rate. If government puts itself in a position to play a part in the press, then government can put itself in a position where it can control the press.

A Blue Collar worker voiced the fear of many:

> No one can perform well when he wears more than one hat. In a real crisis which hat will he wear? There will always be a latent danger in public officials owning newspapers, particularly in a time of crisis.

A local Advertiser proposed that, "If an elected official owns a newspaper, I think he should divorce himself from it during his term in office, like Jimmy Carter stepped out of the peanut business when he was president." A cynical Political Opponent lamented that "both honest and crooked politicians try to control the news media even when they don't own the media."

Several readers, however, pointed out that the high visibility of Clarke's own views in Tribune content has, in a sense, become less "dangerous" because of that visibility; a number said that people read the Tribune with awareness of possible bias in its content. A News Media representative said that he was confident that readers were aware that the Tribune is owned by a "member of government, a promoter of the town." He believes that, "people read the Tribune with the eye of a skeptic." A Blue Collar worker said, "No way is he a watchdog. He never lets you forget he's a public official first and editor second."

A Professional allowed that while Clarke might provide both sides of a controversial issue, Clarke's own position would be "front and center." One Advertiser said, "The paper is simply Raymond's forum--his never-ending open letter to Cullman County." Similarly, a Professional accused Clarke of running a public relations campaign through his newspaper, adding that Clarke's approach is, "'let's not offend anybody and let's put forth my position.'"

But while some complained of the irritation of reading Clarke's own views, several feared the Tribune was being used to lay the groundwork for the editor's ambitions. An Advertiser said Clarke "uses the newspaper to promote himself," while a Political Opponent's choice of terms was "self-aggrandizement." A Blue Collar worker, sympathetic to Clarke's efforts to appear as a "sensible and real leader" by explaining his position and council's position, nonetheless complained that the "constant regularity" of Clarke's explanations "wears thin."

One Political Opponent said, "Raymond's a good fellow, but he's also a flag waver. He's tried to build a power base, and he hasn't succeeded. His intentions are wrong." Another opponent noted "a fine line of distinction between using the paper wisely and misusing it. I think Raymond misuses the paper. And I also think he intends to run for mayor or for the state legislature."

Clarke does not deny that he has political ambitions beyond the council seat. But he did say he would sell the newspaper if he were to seek higher political office.

The most common complaints about Clarke, however, dealt

not with his ambition or even his use of the paper to present his views. And notably, few complaints dealt with his efforts to keep an eye on the Times.

Most complaints dealt with questions of ethics, both journalistic and political. Of the former, a Blue Collar worker said:

> The temptation to slant the news would be a constant problem each week. No matter how honest and objective a person wants to be, you can't assume that someone will report news that will make him look bad. In this case, the politician's instinct for survival raises an ethical question of what he would do.

Other complaints about ethical matters ignored the editor's role entirely. One News Media representative said:

> I'm deadset against educators sitting on boards that appoint their bosses. Raymond serves on the council and the council votes on appointments to the city school board. The school board members are Raymond's bosses. Raymond's voting for a school board member is unethical.

Clarke's boss, the superintendent of schools, the news representative added, must appeal to the council for annual funding. "Last year, the mayor tried to cut the appropriation to city schools, but through Raymond's efforts no cuts were made. That is a terrible conflict of interest."

Can Clarke continue as a successful publisher? A News Media representative sounded a warning in his summary of the situation in Cullman:

> I know that nothing in the Constitution prohibits Raymond from owning a newspaper. But the newspaper is supposed to be the fourth branch of government. The bottom line is that if Raymond has something to contribute, readers will read his paper and advertisers will buy ads. I think he'll fail. I think he has a right to try to make a go of it, but people here don't want his kind of journalism.

Case Study No. 4: The Clinton Daily Democrat

In Brief: Unlike other sampled officials criticized for using their newspapers for self-promotion or attacking enemies, the Clinton mayor is seen by some readers as "innocuous," a mere "figurehead" who has "stepped down, aside, and backward" from using the paper for his own purposes. Indeed, the paper's overall SRI rating places it at the median of the five studied papers. Some readers, however, argue that despite the mayor's reluctance to wield the newspaper's influence, his wife, who edits the paper, does use the paper to present a particular point of view.

The Clinton Daily Democrat is one of the oldest continually operating businesses in Clinton, Missouri, a city of 8,373 located eighty-five miles southeast of Kansas City. Clinton's first newspaper, the 1858 Clinton Journal, became the 1868 Henry County Democrat, and in 1886, the weekly became the daily Clinton Daily Democrat under the ownership of Edwin Mahlon White.

Today, Clinton Mayor Daniel B. Miles, Sr., and Mrs. Mahlon Neill White are co-publishers of three Clinton newspapers--the Clinton Daily Democrat, the weekly Clinton Eye, and a shopper named The Kayo. Miles' wife, Kay White Miles, serves as editor of the three publications, one son is managing editor and the other works in production.

The 68-year-old mayor intended to pursue a journalism career, graduating from the University of Missouri School of Journalism in 1940 (his wife is a 1948 graduate). Miles has worked in journalism since 1940, except for a stint (1960-69)

in Washington, D.C., as adminstrative assistant to a Missouri senator.

Miles credits Bill Bray, executive director of the Missouri Press Association, for triggering an interest in public office. Miles said Bray was wary of a sentiment among some Missouri legislators that taxing newspapers was essential, and a variety of problems with postal regulations, and encouraged editors to become more involved with elective office in self-defense. "Bill Bray said that papers were not expressing themselves on those matters, and he encouraged editors to seek public office."

Miles was elected to the non-salaried mayor's post as a Democrat, but it was through efforts of a coalition of Democrats, Republicans and Independents that he was elected unopposed. "A group called Citizens for Progress was formed, and that group supported my candidacy," he said, adding that the coalition was formed "to remove politics from city government."

Politics, though, is far from removed from Miles' publications. "We are Democrats," he said, "and we tend to support the Democratic Party editorially." Miles' wife is perceived by readers as expressing an anti-Republican bias in her column. Mrs. Miles admits she "used to stir things up with a stick when I was in my 20s," but several readers were stirred more recently by some of her anti-Reagan humor. "That's right," she said. "All kinds of local Republican ladies called and told me not to write about that."

Miles himself does not author a column, nor does he byline stories. Both decisions provide him a relatively low profile

as publisher.

Even though Miles is at an age when some retire, he works daily at the newspaper and at city hall. He arrives at city hall late in the mornings after writing stories and helping to get the three newspapers published, and he stays at city hall until the early afternoon or until city business is completed.

> I try to be at city hall from eleven until noon and from one until two o'clock. Also, I have meetings to attend, both city meetings and other organizations. And then there are ribbon cuttings and ground breakings. But there are so many of these kinds of things that I would be going to as a newsman anyway, that it's not as disruptive as you might think. For instance, last night I covered a chamber of commerce meeting and a downtown association meeting in the afternoon, and tonight there is a city council meeting. Sometimes, though, it's not until late in the evening when I'm through attending meetings and writing stories from those meetings.

Miles' oldest son covers city council meetings, while Miles himself covers most other public body meetings, including school board, county court, zoning commission, planning commission, hospital board, and chamber of commerce. Although he is a member of several of the public bodies that he covers as a

newsman, Miles said he finds little problem in covering other public bodies whose members he must sometimes work with on city business in his role of mayor.

> I find that I have an advantage in covering county court, school board, and other bodies. I find that other public officials have certain misconceptions about city government, and when I am at meetings covering them as a reporter, the officials sometimes ask me to fill in details and provide them with information that I have because I am mayor. I don't speak out at those meetings as a reporter, but I do fill in details if I'm asked.

Miles said a "fine line of distinction" exists in his serving as a reporter and editor while he also serves as mayor. He explained how he attempts to avoid the appearance of any conflicts of interest:

> I know some members of the press question whether a newsman should serve in public office, and it is questionable. But I don't question it if it's done correctly. Everybody at the newspaper office who writes knows that I am fair game. There is a fine line of distinction, and a lot of it is a matter of perception. So, I don't even get near that fine line. But

> generally it is not a good idea for an editor to serve in public office. One of the crimes of the past was that people who owned newspapers published them as a party matter or for political gain.

The mayor's office takes more and more time from his newspaper job as Clinton grows, but, Miles said, "I still feel that I'm more newspaperman than anything else because I was educated in that area and involved in it for most of my life." But, he admitted, "I don't really know if that's the public's perception. People approach me deferentially as mayor rather than as editor. I always thought it should be the other way around!"

Other members of the Miles family who write for the three papers are aware of the dangers of public perception of conflict of interest. Miles' wife said, "We are all aware that there are people out there who will take potshots at Dan."

But she said that she thinks allowing their oldest son to cover city council meetings eliminates most of the potential problems. "He calls it as he sees it," she said. Her son, however, said, "I play it straight, but sometimes I give the city the benefit of the doubt."

Mrs. Miles acknowledged one problem that has arisen as a result of her husband's serving in public office: as mayor his picture seems to appear too often in the newspaper, at ribbon cuttings or ground breakings. Miles agreed. "The ribbon cutting drives me up a tree," he said. "We have always been 'protown', but printing too many pictures of me could make it

appear that the paper is placing too much emphasis on the mayor's office." Miles said he has "all but refused" to participate in such picturetaking sessions.

The Reaction of Readers

Miles, who claims no higher political ambitions, says his newspaper serves as a "watchdog" on local government. Yet his papers rarely publish editorials on local issues. Furthermore, readers say he is guilty of "downplaying stories that other newspapers would play up."

One reader noted an instance in which the Democrat published a potentially controversial story about the county sheriff on page twelve, using a headline that disguised the fact that the sheriff had been named as a defendant in two lawsuits. The sheriff, involved in a heated election, may have benefitted from the small headline which gave no hint of his impending lawsuits. Further, the 94-word lead emphasized the county's insurance representative as the newsmaker rather than the sheriff. Finally, the larger of the two lawsuits--seeking $2.5 million in punitive damages and $41,382 in actual damages--was played lower in the story than the lawsuit which sought $1,000 in damages. "I've seen this kind of thing happen not once, but many times in Dan's paper," said the reader.

A Blue Collar worker agreed, saying Miles uses his newspaper to "educate people to his point of view." He said:

> Dan can take a story that has a negative side to it and write it so that you'd never know the story has a negative side. He should be presenting the negative

> side, but he turns it into a positive story by using the newspaper to educate people to his point of view. Most people don't have that kind of tool to use, but he's older, thinks things through, and is very subtle with the way he uses the paper.

Miles was also criticized for delaying publication of stories. One reader said Miles would hold a story if he thought the community would benefit. "If we are working with an industrial prospect and publicity could hurt, some newspapers would publish news that the city or chamber of commerce was dealing with a prospect," said the reader, a director of the chamber of commerce. "But if I asked Dan to hold the story, he would."

The paper's editor, Mrs. Miles, affirmed the chamber member's view.

> Since Dan is mayor, he knows things that are about to pop. That doesn't mean he holds things back. But if there are negotiations or dickering to get a new factory, he wouldn't print anything about the negotiations if he thought we could lose the factory.

A Blue Collar worker, though, insists that Miles has made a habit of "reporting a story next week that should have been reported today." He said:

> It's not a good idea for a person to be a

> publisher and a public official because he acts like a pressure valve and lets a story break when it's safe to let it break. He does a very subtle job of relieving pressure by timing when he prints a story. He prints some stories after the pressure is off. The only reason he's able to do that is that we have only one newspaper in town. If we had two newspapers, that wouldn't happen.

The same person said that Miles holds or fails to print stories on actions at council meetings "when the radio station is not present" to report the meetings.

Similarly, several readers who complained about the Clinton newspapers' Democratic bias, said Miles' biggest fault is a lack of willingness to get involved in local issues. For example, an Advertiser described Miles as "a nice old man who runs a paper that never steps on anyone's toes."

A Professional echoed this view:

> I never think of Dan Miles as a force. Kay, his wife, is the force. They are the only game in town, and they are a force only because of that. The mayor here is a figurehead. As far as power goes, the city manager and council have the power.

Another said:

> The mayor of Clinton has always been sort

> of like the granddaddy of the town. Mr. Miles was elected mayor because he was a nice guy, because he never offended anyone, and because he has a political history serving in Washington during the Kennedy and Johnson years.

A Political Opponent who nonetheless helped organize the Citizens for Progress coalition that helped elect Miles said that the absence of conflicts was one reason the coalition supported Miles. "He's had a folksy-approach to his newspaper, and he's always felt a responsibility to the community." But the opponent echoed many others who recognized the "behind-scenes" influence.

> The heart of the paper, the guidance of the paper, comes from the son and wife. And Mrs. White is the reigning monarch. Dan has stepped down, aside, and back-ward. He's chosen community service over the newspaper. But he's astute enough to sidestep controversy.

A Professional said that Miles avoids issues involving personalities. "He is hardly ever critical of a public official, and if there are times when he should be critical, then all he does is say nothing." He added that, "Dan wouldn't run an unfavorable story if an advertiser asked him not to, but it wouldn't have anything to do with how much money the advertiser spent. It would depend on who the advertiser was in town."

Clinton residents may have become accustomed to Miles'

style of newspapering. As a News Media representative argued, the Miles family has owned newspapers in Clinton for so long that many readers probably were not aware that newspapers sometimes do act as "watchdogs" over local government.

> People in Clinton just don't care. Probably half of the town wouldn't know who the mayor is, and the other half wouldn't know or care who is editor. I think it may be because it's pre-ordained who is going to be mayor. Dan Miles worked in the big leagues in Washington, and it was his time to serve as our ceremonial mayor. Dan's not the type of person to criticize others, of course.

Another News Media representative pointed to conflicts that accompany Miles' dual roles, though she specified conflicts for <u>others</u>--not Miles.

> The biggest conflict is where the two roles tend to overlap, where there is ambiguity when there shouldn't be any. I am not sure that it presents a conflict for Dan, but it does present conflicts for people who serve on boards where Dan is a member. The board members have told me they don't know how much they can comfortably say to Dan. They aren't sure whether he would keep things in confidence as an editor. They would like to

be able to confide in him as a mayor, but they just aren't sure what they can say when he's present taking notes at a meeting.

Still, one of the most often-voiced reader complaints dealt simply with the Miles papers' political leanings and failure to provide any sort of forum for ideas--especially Republican ideas. A Political Opponent said, "Their writing isn't slanted against Republicans some of the time, it's slanted all of the time. I get mad when a Republican rally is on the back page, but what can you do when they have the only paper in town?"

Another Political Opponent said:

> Recently, there was a tongue-in-cheek column written by Dan's wife. She wrote that John Ashcroft, who is a Republican candidate for governor, was for capital punishment. Then in the next sentence she said that if Ashcroft were elected, we'd be seeing public hangings in the Clinton square and that, at least, things would not be so dull around here. It's tongue-in-cheek, but with the mentality of people around here, there will be people thinking that Republicans are for capital punishment and public hangings. Dan agrees with all that or he would put a stop to it. What he should

be doing is writing local editorials, but they stay away from local issues and take cheap shots at Republicans instead.

Miles answers these complaints this way: "This year, Republicans have probably gotten more news coverage than Democrats, but we probably have more Democratic coverage from year to year than Republican because there are more Democrats in the county."

Regardless, the most common refrain heard is that, beyond promoting Clinton, Miles newspapers' are bland, doing little to provoke readers into thinking. Among some younger readers, for example, the Democrat is described as "stagnant and not thought-provoking." A Professional said:

> We lost Peabody Coal, and the farmers have had five bad years. Everybody thought Truman Lake (recreation area) would open up and that cash registers would overflow. But that hasn't happened. All the paper does is to report industrial development committee meetings in a tweedle-dee, tweedle-dum way. The paper doesn't do enough to let people know that the town could die. Dan's paper is innocuous. It doesn't get people to thinking. People here take a lot of pushing to get them involved, but the paper doesn't push.

But Miles' can count among his readers many supporters.

One Advertiser, who announced he was "pro-Dan Miles," said it might be a good idea for all public officials to serve as editors;

> In newspaper reporting, the media often report what they think people ought to hear rather than the message the public official is trying to get across. Sure, the person who owns the media has the advantage in having access to the media, but at the same time there should be no mistake in his message. Often, you read and wonder whether a public official actually said what was reported, but if it comes out in the public official's newspaper, there should be no mistake in understanding his message.

Another reader, a Professional, endorsed Miles but stopped short of the Advertiser's position.

> It's not a good idea for all public officials to own their own newspapers, but in Dan's case it's different. In the hands of the wrong person, it would be a disaster.

Case Study No. 5: The Golconda Herald Enterprise

In Brief: The Herald-Enterprise was comparatively low in perceived responsibility, earning an SRI score second only to the Cullman, Alabama, newspaper. Why? As the following inter-

views reveal, the publisher-official became embroiled in a controversy involving funding of his public office, and has subsequently used his paper deliberately to attack his opponents. He has also withheld coverage of his opponents' activities, except as a focus for his attacks.

When the Pope County, Illinois, Board of Commissioners cut the sheriff's budget and forced layoffs in January 1984, the publisher of the weekly Herald-Enterprise did what many publishers might do: he charged in a front-page headline that "County Commissioners Plan to Reduce Sheriff's Department to Mere Token Agency." A deck read: "Budget Cut Will Endanger Protection of County Citizens, Curtail Other Services--Sheriff." With too few employees to provide 24-hour supervision, the Pope County Jail would indeed be closed in the wake of budget cuts.

Rodney J. Brenner, the weekly's editor for 40 years, criticized the board's action, calling it "unbelievably insane" in his column. In a front page news story, Brenner continued: "The current plan of the county board of commissioners to dismember one of the best sheriff's departments in Southern Illinois will truly imperil the health and safety of every man, woman and child in our county. It is disgustingly irresponsible and a move that smacks of immaturity and inability to gauge the needs of the public."

While presentation of Brenner's scathing reaction in news coverage of the budget cuts is not unusual (and is, in fact, good journalism), another fact in this case makes the paper's use of his caustic remarks somewhat problematic: Rodney J.

Brenner, publisher, is sheriff of Pope County.

In addition to his sheriff's hat, Brenner wears several others, including chairman of the Southeastern College Board of Trustees, an elective community college post decided by voters in seven counties. The 69-year-old sheriff has long been active in public and political life in rural, sparsely populated Pope County (the county has fewer than 6,000 residents, while its principal town, Golconda, has a population of 960).

A 1939 graduate of the University of Illinois, Brenner said he bought the newspaper from a state senator who was "as crooked as a dog's hind leg." His first foray into politics came when he won election as deputy county coroner, a post he held for 20 years before he ran for coroner and won. At one time, he was coroner, sheriff, community college board chairman, and editor and publisher. Among other current public duties are chairmanship of the conservancy district, membership on the waterworks board and several committees associated with his law enforcement career.

"I've been in everything," Brenner said. "That's the way it is in small towns."

Today, Brenner and his wife, a former schoolteacher, operate the Herald-Enterprise from their home. Brenner, who writes all stories that deal with public bodies or issues, says he often works until "three or four in the mornings each Monday and Tuesday" to get the newspaper published. Then, sometimes on only "one or two hours of sleep," he returns to law enforcement work with the single deputy that budget cuts left him. The sheriff has had to assume dispatcher's duties, and a police

radio in the Brenner home crackles all night long and during weekends. All prisoners must be taken to another county.

Because of the rift with commissioners, Brenner no longer covers the commissioners' meetings. Nor does he publish minutes of the meetings. "We'd like to get our minutes in the paper, but Rodney won't talk to us," said Commissioner Kenneth Buchanan.

The controversy between Brenner and the commissioners has been a dominant topic in the Herald-Enterprise for more than a year. The issue has drawn banner front-page headlines, letters to the editor, and widespread television and newspaper coverage. Brenner authors two columns, "Sheriff's Corner," which appears two or three times per month, and a front-page column, "Hello Neighbor," which has never failed to appear weekly during the past 40 years. During the controversy, however, the conflict with the commissioners seemed to span the boundaries of columns and news stories.

Yet Brenner sees no conflict of interest in his owning and editing a newspaper while serving in public office.

> I don't see any conflict. Or at least I don't recognize any conflicts. I haven't changed my attitude as sheriff except that now I think everybody is an S.O.B. You'll find that there are more S.O.B.s out there when you are sheriff.

While Brenner said he considers himself a "watchdog" over local government in his editor's role, examination of the Herald-Enterprise suggests that he limits exercise of that

function to harsh criticism of the commissioners and to occasional challenges to the U.S. Forest Service based in Pope County.

For example, in a story published prior to the commissioners' taking action to cut the sheriff's budget, Brenner wrote a headline--"Proposed Move Will Invite Criminals into County"--that clearly reflected his own interests. The story was illustrated with a photograph of the sheriff and a caption above the photograph, "Deeply Concerned," provided a prelude to 28 inches of comment in the story from the sheriff, without a single quote from the commissioners.

Note how the story weaves a variety of "appeals" to readers, quotes from the concerned sheriff, and opinion.

> A wave of growing concern is sweeping over Pope County as citizens are becoming aware of a plan...to drastically slash the budget of the Pope County Seriff's Department, thereby rendering it virtually helpless to safeguard the health and safety of the citizens, keep the peace, and enforce the laws...We will have to severely limit the patrols past the rural homes of our elderly couples and many elderly ladies living alone who have come to feel save and secure in the knowledge that they are being protected by the sheriff's department...The sheriff pointed out that these are but a few of

> the services the department will have to curtail if the county board of commissioners insists upon rim-wrecking the department. He mentioned the countless hours of counseling that he has spent with confused youths, troubled parents, and many couples who believe themselves to be incompatible. "Many of these people," he said, "merely need someone to talk to. I am a good listener, and I feel that at various times I have been helpful."

The sheriff's criticism may have reached a zenith in December 1983 when he wrote that he had met with the commissioners in an unsuccessful attempt to have the board's "unprecedented and unwarranted" action rescinded. Warning the citizenry "not to panic," Brenner protested that he was worried about farmers and rural businessmen "who will be prey to thieves and marauders who already are aware that we will be unable to patrol the county as in the past." This impassioned plea pointed the finger directly at the commissioners: "Although some persons are willing and able to ignore their responsibilities to the citizens for whom they work, I am not, and will not."

The same issue carried 10 photographs of the sheriff's staff who had been terminated, with a headline, "Commissioners axe county sheriff's dept; county deprived of dedicated, capable personnel." A listing of fifty-five names of former she-

riff's department employees was included, and a front-page photo of the former chief dispatcher was captioned "Capable, Loved, Devoted--Terminated." The accompanying text described completion of the final report she would file:

> One of the most knowledgeable, dedicated, and compassionate chief dispatchers in Southern Illinois, she was terminated by county commissioners Bennie Gibbs, Kenneth Buchanan, and Johnny Climer. Finally, this great lady closed the big book, neatly folded her reports and placed them on the sheriff's desk, lovingly touched that desk, the desk of the deputy, and her own, slowly and almost reverently strolled through the booking room, the kitchen, the laundry room, and jail now closed because of the commissioners' action. Tearfully, she opened the door, passed through it for the last time, not daring to look back, slowly entered her automobile, and drove away.

In other articles and columns Brenner gave the commissioners--and readers' handkerchiefs--no respite. He warned of the imminent consequences of the "ill-advised plan": the "invasion" by motorcycle gangs, "mean, generally dope addicts," who pose a "constant threat" to Pope County. He claimed that he had processed more gun permits for citizens than at any time in his five-year tenure as sheriff. He quoted himself as having

learned that commissioners had $120,000 "in the bank" which could have saved the department.

Were readers provided responses from the commissioners? Not in the Herald-Enterprise. In a separate interview, though, one commissioner said, "Rodney wanted to play the role of an administrator. He wanted to sit in the sheriff's office and let the dispatcher work and send the deputies out. What our little county needs is a working sheriff."

The other target of Brenner's editorial venom has been the U.S. Forest Service. Brenner said:

> We have a lot of government ground in Pope County, and the forest service has been a pain in the neck for as long as I can remember. They're liars, cheats, and parasites. They've eroded our tax base and messed up our revenue. They've used our roads and don't provide many jobs.

But other local officials and local government appear to escape purview of the busy Herald-Enterprise editor. For example, minutes of the local school board are edited slightly and re-printed in the paper. Neither Brenner nor any staff member attends school board meetings or city council meetings, and Brenner has not attended county commission meetings since January 1984.

His vitriolic assault on the commission notwithstanding, Brenner claims that he publishes a "good news" newspaper.

> It's all a matter of growing up here, being here so long, knowing what's going

> on. I have a built-in antenna. I know there's not all that much coming out of here from local government, and maybe that's a good thing. I just don't put much controversy in the paper. I'm kind of a good news guy. There's enough sadness in the world that I don't play it up.

Furthermore, he said he doesn't mind the criticism and accusations that he uses his newspaper for his own personal gain in the controversy with commissioners. "People here know that I've always tried to boost the community," he said. "But I won't run for sheriff again. I can see where it causes problems."

The Reaction of Readers

Opinion is mixed on Brenner's performance as an editor and sheriff. However, a number of Pope County residents question whether a sheriff who is also an editor can remain impartial when an issue involves his public office. The major complaint is that Brenner presents only one side of the commission issue--his side. Some readers say the editor has succumbed to the temptation to use the newspaper to espouse his views to the exclusion of differing views.

One major Advertiser said, "Rodney's a friend of mine, but I still went and looked at the county budget. What I found was that he used the paper to tell his side of the story, and that's that." But despite any problems in Brenner's journalism, the Advertiser added, "I'm just tickled to death that

we have a newspaper. A small town has to have a newspaper or it's dead."

One Professional argued that multiple-roles were inevitable in a small town. "We're short on people," he said. "You have to wear three or four hats to get the job done. You have to have an overlap of authority in a small town."

However, another Professional lamented that, "We need a 'third-party' editor. People are human, and Rodney likes to have the 'edge'" his newspaper provides.

A Political Opponent said that Brenner "uses the paper to his benefit, to portray himself as a bright, shining star. It's hard to beat a newspaper. He puts the commissioners down in the paper. You get tired of his constant mean-mouthing."

Another opponent agreed:

> There's no doubt that Rodney uses the paper to promote himself. He's always got pictures of marijuana plants, but he never catches anyone. He catches the goods, not the criminals. All of that is for show, it's politics. At times, you'd expect to drive by the sheriff's office and see them sitting there wearing Canadian Royal Mounted Police uniforms.

A supporter of Brenner's said that what he called the sheriff's "sophistication" and glibness gave him an advantage in handling himself in controversy. "The commissioners didn't hav the ability to put their opinions into words, and their lack of education showed when they tried to defend their ac-

tions on television," he said. "Rodney is slicker and smarter, and he came off better than the commissioners."

But another Professional argued that, "Rodney's no diplomat. Some of the things he wrote made the commissioners even more adamant about cutting his budget."

A Blue Collar worker said that Brenner's chief fault was failure to present both sides to an issue. "I know for a fact that other offices in the courthouse had their budgets cut, but Rodney never mentioned that," he said. Instead, he printed 15 or 20 stories "gigging the commissioners" that "were mighty one-sided."

But for every critic, there seems to be a supporter, however lukewarm. One Advertiser said:

> (Rodney) got out of kilter with some of our politicians, but he had more help at the sheriff's office than we could afford. We had people working there who we should have been watching instead of them watching us. But other than a few idiosyncrasies and ill manners, Rodney is top drawer.

Another Professional also gave Brenner a good rating. "He's the type who would give you the shirt off his back unless you were politically opposed to him," he said. "Rodney is part of our makeup. We've accepted him. We really don't want to make any changes."

However, that opinion was not unanimous, as might be expected. Several people were convinced that Brenner had

clearly overstepped his bounds as editor. One News Media representative reported that the consensus among several other editors in the region was that "he should have kept his views in his columns instead of putting them on page one."

A second News Media representative was more concerned about the consequences of the "media event" created by Brenner's constant coverage of the controversy. "He threw fuel onto the fire, and with the avalanche of publicity, I think you could argue that he advertised for the lawless element to come into Pope County and 'try their hand' at crime."

Another Professional gave Brenner a qualified endorsement, ignoring the commission conflict.

> He's a big asset to the county with the college board. He also fights (the U.S. Forest Service) for us over all this government ground, but there is too much emphasis in the paper on the sheriff's office. When Rodney is running, you see things everywhere. People come in and comment on how much coverage there is of the sheriff's department. It's in his column, on the front page, everywhere. But I guess it's something we'll have to put up with.

Testifying to Brenner's penchant for self-promotion, a Blue Collar worker said that Brenner once published a front-page story about a missing dog, in which he used his picture in his sheriff's uniform rather than a picture of the dog. "The

story was in a box on page one, and there was Rodney's smiling face. Wouldn't it have been better to use a picture of the missing dog?"

But although complaints about Brenner's sins of commission (the attacks on county commissioners, and the public relations via the newspaper) were frequent, several readers pointed to sins of omission as weaknesses of Brenner the editor.

For example, readers complained that Brenner does not attend Golconda City Council meetings, and that the Herald-Enterprise only began reporting school board meeting minutes a couple years ago. One reader said that news of the city's transactions to get a cable television franchise was learned through word-of-mouth, because the Herald-Enterprise mentioned the story only once.

An Advertiser worried that, for some Pope County residents, Brenner's may be the only newspaper they read. "Older people and people who are unemployed read Rodney's paper because they can get it second-hand," he said. "Many of them think that the way he prints it is the way things are."

Finally, a Professional complained that Brenner performs badly in both the editor and sheriff roles. "I have a police radio, and one night Rodney's deputy was trying to locate him, but he couldn't," she said. "I think Rodney likes to be sheriff, but I don't think he likes to work at being sheriff. If you ask me, he spends too little time at either of his jobs."

But despite all the complaints, another contingent of readers simply seems to be enjoying the "good theater" of the

row between the sheriff and the commissioners. "The newspaper is more entertaining now," one reader said. "Before, if you blinked, you missed the newspaper."

Through it all, Brenner insists he experiences no role conflict.

> It depends on the individual. It also depends on judgment. Some people have better judgment than others. I think I have pretty good judgment that prevents any conflict of interest. But in some instances I think conflict could occur. I don't think it is happening in my case, but I wouldn't want to say that serving in public office and owning a paper always will or never would create a conflict of interest. You'd have to look at it case-by-case.

CONCLUSIONS

This monograph reports a study which involved an examination of professional and organizational policies on publishers' holding elected or public office, and in-depth study of five publisher-officials. Publisher-officials and their readers were interviewed, and their newspapers were analyzed.

For the most part, guidelines, codes, canons and policies do not explicitly address conflicts of interest of the type discussed here. Among the media decision makers queried, however, there was general disapproval of publishers' holding elected office. Even in some instances where one might expect codified restrictions (i.e., within centrally administered newspaper chains or groups), policy forbidding journalists' holding office is not formalized. (National groups or chains cede autonomy on local conflicts of interest to member papers themselves.)

But while the consensus seemed to be that publishers should "bend over backwards" to avoid even an appearance of a conflict of interest, many who saw the danger of dual roles nonetheless recognized exceptional circumstances (e.g., when a reporter's beat and the "venue" of his elected office did not clearly overlap). Few, however, went as far as the Lee representative or the Missouri press association official who encouraged publishers to become actively involved in local government.

A recurrent concern, even among national group officers, was the danger of conflicting roles in small towns, where issues and one's allegiances are more visible, where town

leaders often wear several "hats," and where, arguably, the impact of controlling a newspaper's voice would be greatest.

Based on the five small-town publisher-officials examined here, that concern may be well justified.

Although the representativeness of these five publisher-officials is certainly open to question, the instrument provided a standardized basis for comparing the public's evaluation of the five publisher-officials and their newspapers, and for comparing different subgroups' evaluations.

Political Opponents and News Media representatives were the most negative in rating the local newspaper and its office-holding publisher. The political opposition seems to begrudge the additional weapon a newspaper represents, while journalists carry an ingrained suspicion or ethic that news slanting or management is inevitable when the publisher is also a government official.

On the other hand, Professionals, the communities' socio-economic elite sub-class, were the most positive in their evaluations. Perhaps given the often documented tendency of small-town newspapers to be "good news"-oriented or "booster-ish"--a tendency replicated here, and emphasized particularly in two cases--the support of these community economic elites is not surprising.

But while it was possible to discriminate these groups or categories of reader-constituents by the groups' "characteristic" evaluations, the most important factor in the ratings was the specific community, or <u>which</u> publisher-official sub-

jects were rating (i.e., there was greater homogeneity within a town's sampled citizenry than within a role group).

How can these publisher-officials be characterized? While their portraits can be painted with only the broadest strokes of the brush, at one end of a continuum there are two who could generally be considered community "boosters," while the opposite pole identifies two reminiscent of the fiery libertarians of the post-Revolutionary era. Between the poles sits a publisher-official condemned by many as bland, his newspaper labeled by some as "stagnant and not thought-provoking," who is probably more booster than firebrand.

The publisher-officials characterized as "boosters" tend to publish "good news"-papers, accentuating positive aspects of the community. In one case, gentle criticism centers on the publisher-official's tendency to promote himself. In the other case, critics point to the publisher-official's allegiance to a small elite stratum.

At the other extreme sit two publisher-officials whose style of journalism is extremely personal. Both claim neutrality or objectivity, yet their newspapers are clearly their personal weapons for personal crusades. One, the sheriff, focuses his attacks on political opponents, while the other, the school principal, began by attacking what he saw as a politicized other newspaper. The comparison of these two to their libertarian forebears of the post-Revolutionary, partisan press era, remains an apt one, despite each's protestations of being responsive to the community's needs.

Which of these two types of publisher--booster or fire-

brand--is more "socially responsible?" For discussion sake, let us dismiss, for the moment, the fact that each type of publisher is also an official.

If a town's or "society's" needs are stability, cohesiveness, community development and progress, then boosterism or "chamber-of-commerce" journalism, or "putting the community's best foot forward" may be judged "responsible."

If a community's major problem is stagnation or intertia, then a rabble-rousing, leadership posture might be judged responsible.

If government corruption or mismanagement of funds are a community's problems, then an adversarial posture is responsible.

But of course, these are not merely publishers we are speaking of; these are publishers who have a second role in the community.

It is one matter for the publisher, working from a journalist's perspective, to choose boosterism or confrontation as publishing styles. Similarly, conformity and conflict might be seen as values characterizing opposite political styles.

Based on these cases, publishers who are seen as pro-stability, "status quo" in their politics and whose papers reflect a similar style of journalism are acceptable. It is when both publishing style and political style tend to be confrontational or conflict-oriented, that the dual roles of publisher and official provide a focus for negative community opinion. The decision as to whether one of these

configurations constitutes good government but bad journalism, or vice versa, is the community's.

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